

JEREMIAH

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THE BOOK OF
JEREMIAH

Introduction and Commentary

by

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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

FIRST PUBLISHED 1961
© SCM PRESS LTD 1960

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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PREFACE

This commentary is an attempt to help the ordinary reader to read the Book of Jeremiah for himself, and to profit by the wealth of its riches. It is deeply indebted to all the insight that has come from the wrestling by scholars with the many technical problems that the book presents, though it does not aim to make any contribution to the further solution of those problems. Its distinctive character comes from considering the question: What meaning and truth does the Book of Jeremiah have for us today?

The commentary is based upon the Revised Standard Version as the best translation generally available at the time of writing. At the same time, care has been taken to see that readers who have only the Authorized Version before them will find the commentary intelligible and helpful. But it has not been thought necessary to put down on paper all the gains in clarity and accuracy which the Revised Standard Version presents.

My indebtedness to distinguished friends who have helped me to think about the prophet Jeremiah is too great for me to mention here. But I must thank Professor Ronald Gregor Smith who, as editor of the SCM Press, first entrusted me with the task of writing the commentary, though he himself was interested in doing it. I hope that he is not too disappointed in the result. I must also thank my colleague the Rev. Dr Edgar Jones for the stimulus of his friendship and for our mutual reinforcement in the understanding of the Scriptures. He has done me the great service of reading and commenting on what I have written. I also owe much to Miss Dorothy Gill for her generosity, patience and skill in typing the manuscript. I am indebted to the SCM Press for their careful preparation of my typescript for the printer, and to my daughter Margaret for help in proof-reading.

H. C.-J.

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- JULIUS A. BEWER, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 2 volumes (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951-52).
- ARTUR WEISER, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia* (Das Alte Testament Deutsch), 2 volumes (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1952, 1953), unfortunately not translated into English but a fine exposition.
- 'The Book of Jeremiah'—Introduction and Exegesis by James Philip Hyatt, Exposition by Stanley Romaine Hopper in *The Interpreter's Bible* 5 (Nelson, 1956).

As an introductory pamphlet, that written by William Meiklejohn and entitled *The Prophet of Hope—a study of the Prophet Jeremiah* (published by the Church of Scotland Youth Committee in 1949) is admirable.

INTRODUCTION

THE DISORDER OF THE BOOK

No one can pretend that the Book of Jeremiah is an orderly book. It could only be made so by severe pruning away of additional material and by drastic rearrangement to present a relatively accurate chronological scheme. The nearest analogy to the ordering of the material is that of a library, in which the original collection had its own classification, but to which other collections of various sizes have been added, without their either conforming to the original classification or being given a new overall classification.

So far as chronology is concerned, the difficulty is not that no attention is paid to it (chs. 37-44 are in particular chronologically consecutive) but that two conflicting principles of arrangement have been used, one chronological and the other topical. In addition, the original collected sequence has been disturbed. The Septuagint Greek translation of the book (usually designated LXX) is approximately one-eighth shorter than the Hebrew text, though this does not solve for us the question what is and what is not additional material. (The most important omissions are 8.10b-12; 10.6-8, 10; 17.1-5a; 29.16-20; 33.14-26; 39.4-13; 52.28-30.) And the collection of prophecies against foreign nations given at 46.1-51.58 follows 25.13 in the LXX in what is probably their original position, though the order of prophecies is better in the Hebrew (and English).¹ When we add that the additional material includes at least four marginal comments which have crept into the text—one, the only verse in Aramaic in the book, itself an intrusion into a later addition, is a formula against idols 'Thus shall you say to them: "The gods who did not make the heavens and the

¹ See the table on p. 287.

earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens” (10.11); a second is a liturgical comment, ‘Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers’ (20.13); a third is a comment by a reader who found life harsh after what he had been reading: ‘Thereupon I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me’ (31.26); and the fourth is an incitement to further destruction of Moab: ‘Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness: and cursed is he who keeps his sword from bloodshed’ (48.10)—we have some idea of the complexity of the book.

What we can do about this is, first, to find a way of reading the book, and then to understand the original structure.

Because we are not likely to have an agreed expurgated and rearranged edition of the book in general use, we must learn to find our way about the book as it stands. For this purpose the division of the book into three parts with an historical appendix is a clear help. We must remember that chs. 1-25 are mainly a collection of poetry, and demand the sustained attention that must be given to poetry, though once they are familiar the poetry lays hold upon the mind with greater power than prose. Chs. 26-45, apart from the fact that they are not in chronological sequence and that chs. 30-31 and 33 are a poetic intrusion, are very readable. Chs. 46-51.58 are admittedly difficult, not only because they are poetry, and not only because so much of them does not come from Jeremiah, but because apart from the prophecy on Moab in 48.11-13, there is so little to lift the mind towards a new insight into a true relation between God and the nations. The book ends with the story of the casting into the Euphrates of Jeremiah’s prophecy against Babylon, and an historical appendix, whose material we are prepared for by the time we come to it.

An easy way of picking out the heart of the book is to concentrate first on the story of the fall of Jerusalem and the life of Jeremiah in relation to it. In Part One the first chapter introduces us to Jeremiah, and we may note the preaching of

the temple sermon in 7.1-15, the preaching of the covenant in 11.1-8, the visit to the house of the potter (18.1-6), and Jeremiah's night in the stocks (20.1-6). In Part Two we must first see what belongs to the reign of Jehoiakim, reading the account of the preaching of the temple sermon and its consequences in ch. 26, and of the writing, reading and rewriting of Jeremiah's scroll of prophecies in ch. 36, and illuminating our understanding of what is involved by reading 25.1-14, a summary of the prophecies, 46.1-12, a prophecy against Egypt, 22.13-19, Jeremiah's verdict on King Jehoiakim, and ch. 45, God's promise to Baruch; to this reign also belongs ch. 35, the lesson in obedience from the Rechabites.

In spite of the fact that he only reigned for three months, we must take account of King Jehoiachin—reading the two prophecies in 22.24-30 and associating with them the earlier prophecy in 13.18 f. and the postscript in 52.31-34 that after thirty-seven years of captivity he was at least given royal prison conditions. Jehoiachin in prison in Babylon was a real influence on what happened in Jerusalem.

The reign of Zedekiah leads to the fall of Jerusalem. To it belong the vision of the two baskets of figs in ch. 24, Jeremiah's warning to the ambassadors of the nations round about in ch. 27; with this we may read his prophecy of the cup of God's wrath, 25.15 f., and the prophecy against Moab in 48.11-13, and also in ch. 27 his sense that the temple will be even further denuded of its ornaments (as it was, see 52.17-23); here also come Jeremiah's contest with false prophecy in the person of Hananiah (ch. 28), his letter to the exiles in Babylon bidding them seek its welfare (ch. 29), and the casting into the Euphrates of Jeremiah's prophecy against Babylon (51.58-64). The story of the siege and fall of Jerusalem begins with Jeremiah's warning that Zedekiah must surrender (34.1-7); then follows, when the siege is lifted, his further warning that the Babylonians will come back again (37.1-10), the horrible story of the pledge to slaves broken because the siege has been lifted (34.8-22), and the account of Jeremiah's imprisonment,

Zedekiah's first interview with Jeremiah and Jeremiah's better prison conditions (37.11-21). At this point comes Jeremiah's purchase of a piece of land in his home town (Anathoth) as a sign of God's purpose of good towards Judah (32.1-15), and thereafter in chs. 38-44 we have a continuous story of the final stages of the siege of Jerusalem, its fall, and the aftermath ending with Jeremiah and Baruch being dragged off to Egypt—Jeremiah in conflict with his people, but undaunted.

Against the background of the story thus discovered we can read Jeremiah's poetry—the early prophecies in chs. 2-6, and the long section in chs. 7-20 in which there are many important prophecies on the absence of the knowledge of God in his people, but in which the highlight is perhaps a series of private disclosures by Jeremiah telling of his own struggles to accept the knowledge of God in his own life; to these we may add Jeremiah's vision of the future in 23.1-8, and link with this the important prophecies in 31.2-6, 15-22 and 31-34, and his exposition of the true nature of prophecy in contrast with false, 23.9-33. The poetry of Jeremiah may require more initial effort in reading than prose does, but no one should fail to understand that it is richly rewarding.¹ Jeremiah was not Israel's supreme poet; Amos, Isaiah and Nahum stand higher for sheer poetry. Nevertheless he must be given a place of honour. His lyrics have a wonderful range and depth of feeling, and in both poetry and prose he abounds in terse and memorable phrases (cf. 2.13; 5.30 f.; 8.20; 12.5; 13.23; 15.18; 23.29). The rest of the book is secondary and adds nothing to our understanding of the life and work of Jeremiah.

The book itself has its origin in the rewritten scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies about which we read in ch. 36. The content of this scroll is of course guess-work so far as we are concerned, but it seems safe to assume that part at least of chs. 1-6 belong to it. To this it seems that Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary (see note at 32.12) has added a second collection of

¹ On the technical aspect of Jeremiah's poetry read T. H. Robinson, *The Poetry of the Old Testament*, 1947, chs. 1 and 2.

Jeremiah's prophecies up to the fall of Jerusalem (with 1.1-3 as a preface to the combined collection). It is natural that Jeremiah's disclosure to Baruch of the struggles he has had (which may reach back into the earlier period) should appear in the second collection. Baruch has crowned his services to Jeremiah by adding an account of the public conflict of Jeremiah with kings, priests, prophets and the people also up to the fall of Jerusalem. How far the record of events after the fall of Jerusalem (40.7-44.10) comes from the pen of Baruch we cannot say. 40.7-41.18, which deals with the assassination of Gedaliah, the Governor of Judah appointed by Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem, does not mention Jeremiah; and, though it comes from a contemporary source, this probably was not Baruch. In chs. 42-44 there are lifelike touches (42.1-17; 43.1-7; 44.15-19) which may owe their existence to Baruch's reminiscence, but it is difficult to feel that we are as closely in touch with Jeremiah (and Baruch) in these chapters as we were in the chapters leading up to the fall of Jerusalem.

In addition to the foundation work of Baruch we owe much to a Deuteronomistic editor who wrote about 550 BC—thirty to forty years after the fall of Jerusalem. (The word 'Deuteronomistic' is used to distinguish him and others like him from the actual authors of the Book of Deuteronomy in the seventh century. He reflects their influence.) We find his hand in enlargements and explanations (e.g. explanations of the exile. 5.18 f.; 9.12-16; 16.10-13; 22.8 f., the section on sabbath observance, 17.19-27, the additional explanation of the parable of the potter, 18.7-12, and the long explanatory expansion of the story of the buying of the field at Anathoth, 32.16-44). But though some of his work may be pruned away from the book with advantage, he was the final overall editor, and we owe it to him that the book was transmitted.

But other passages were added in the course of time. For example, chs. 30-31 constitute 'a book of comfort' which circulated separately. It contains precious material from Jeremiah in 31.2-6, 15-22, 31-34, but is otherwise secondary. In ch. 33,

vv. 14-26, are a later comment on 23.5 f., which was circulated as a flysheet. Predictions of the future have been added (e.g. 3.15-18; 25.27-33). Psalms have been inserted (e.g. 10.25=Ps. 79.6 f.). A passage on the powerlessness of idols (10.1-16) influenced by Deutero-Isaiah, and a proverbial saying (17.11) are included. A legalistic explanation of 23.33 was appended in 23.34-40. In the prophecies against the nations there are expansions in chs. 46-49 (particularly in chs. 48-49), and 50.1-51.58 come wholly from a later time. 40.7-41.18 and 52.1-34 are historical additions. The disorder of the book comes, indeed, from accumulated additional material added without editorial supervision.

Such a complex work contains many textual, literary and historical problems on which there cannot be unanimity of opinion. All the commentator has sought to do is to come to reasonable judgments on the material to enable him (and others) to profit by what is written. But judgments differing in greater or less degree are of course possible.

THE TIMES IN WHICH JEREMIAH LIVED

Jeremiah lived in a time of far-reaching change. The Assyrian Empire, which had been founded in the eighth century by Tiglath-Pileser, was coming to an end. Its last strong king had been Ashurbanipal (669-633 BC). It was the weakness of the Assyrian Empire that enabled King Josiah to strike a blow for religious and political independence, and to bring about the reforms associated with his name (II Kings 22, 23). In this situation Pharaoh Neco of Egypt associated himself with Assyria for his own ends—to strengthen the power of Egypt itself or even to take over the Assyrian Empire. Because Josiah resisted the demand of Egypt for active support in this, he was killed at Megiddo (II Kings 23.29 f.; II Chron. 35.20-24).

But Egypt had miscalculated. Babylon, the power rising

against Assyria, was stronger than Egypt knew. Nabopolassar of Chaldea had made himself the independent ruler of Babylon by 626, and conquered Nineveh in 616. His son, Nebuchadnezzar II, who was to rule for forty-three years, fought and won, on Babylon's behalf, the decisive battle against Egypt at Carchemish on the river Euphrates in 605 BC (see Jer. 46.2; II Chron. 35.20). Thereafter Babylon consolidated its power.

Of course, this was a very fluid political situation, and political misjudgments of some kind were almost inevitable. But any reasonable policy for Judah was to live in as much detachment and quietness in relation to the greater powers as possible, and certainly not to try the dangerous game of playing one off against the other. The vacillations of both King Jehoiakim and King Zedekiah were bound to be fatal. It was in the midst of this pervasive instability that Jeremiah lived and had to make his religious and political judgments.¹

It is worth noting that the people whom we would naturally call the Babylonians are referred to in the Book of Jeremiah as the *Chaldeans*. This is because the royal dynasty of Babylon at this period came from Chaldea, which is a district of Babylonia.

THE NATURE OF THEOCRACY

When we read the Hebrew prophets, one of the things that we must constantly remember is that they are *theocrats* in a sense in which it is not possible for any one at all in the modern world to be, because *theocracy* is a way of thinking which we have outgrown and we cannot return to it. Austin Farrer has written: 'Nothing, perhaps, but the prophets' dramatic attempt to predict and wield the destiny of peoples in the name of God could have created the sense of history as an intrinsically

¹ See Oesterley and Robinson, *A History of Israel*, 1932, vol. I, chs. 20-21; G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, 1957, ch. 10; John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 1960, ch. 8.

meaningful forward movement: but prophetism must be got rid of before scientific history can begin, for the dynamic of historical process is not rightly estimated by intuitions of a moralist divine teleology in battles and famines.¹ This at least indicates the presence of a problem to which Adam Welch also drew attention in his distinction between the form and content of the prophetic message.²

Of course, all Christians must be theocrats in the sense of believing in the rule of God, but theocracy in its technical meaning implies a particular kind of rule. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines theocracy as 'a form of government in which God is recognized as the king or immediate ruler, and his laws are taken as the statute-book of the kingdom, these laws being usually administered by a priestly order as his ministers and agents; . . . especially applied to the commonwealth of Israel from the exodus to the election of Saul as king'. We may interpret that in relation to our present concern, and say that theocracy is a form of government in which the distinction between religion and politics is not yet drawn.

Of course, a prophet is not a king (and certainly a prophet is not a political thinker expressing himself in an unfortunate and largely irrelevant religious terminology; that is a modern perversion). But it is a mistake to think of the conflict between Jeremiah and King Jehoiakim as a conflict between church and state. It is a conflict between two points of view, both of which had political and religious implications. So we have to interpret Jeremiah's convictions about the two focal points of his life which are, as Rudolph so rightly says, his God and his people, in terms of distinctions that were not present to his mind. It is particularly necessary to do this with Jeremiah, because of the extraordinary concreteness of his mind. He felt it his duty to face to the full all the practical religious demands of the situation through which he lived. He left it to others to draw out the implications of his pioneer action and reflection.

¹ *The Glass of Vision*, 1948, p. 101.

² *Jeremiah, His Time and Work*, pp. 48-49.

WHAT GOD WAS DOING IN THE FALL OF
JERUSALEM

Jerusalem fell as a result of political folly. It is quite clear that Jeremiah's political judgment was infinitely superior to that of either of the two kings Jehoiakim or Zedekiah. This is only one strand in the complex of his thought, not singled out for comment as a separate item, but it is there and we must not overlook it.

But it is not all. Jeremiah also clearly believed that involved in the fall of Jerusalem was God's retribution for Judah's sin, though we must remember that for him the meaning of 'sin' included political unwisdom as well as religious instability and unworthiness. (The Deuteronomistic editor has expressed and not misrepresented this aspect of Jeremiah's thought in 5.18 f.; 9.12-16; 16.10-13; 22.8 f.)

But this is not the deepest aspect of Jeremiah's thinking which we must not miss because he thinks concretely and not abstractly. Jeremiah believed that through the fall of Jerusalem God was testing and trying his people so that they should truly *turn* to him, and that in turning to him they should find that true knowledge of God which both their corporate institutions and personal representatives were meant to embody; and that God himself should repent, that is, change the direction of his purpose towards them. All that God did to his people through the fall of Jerusalem he did in fulfilment of his covenant obligation to them and as an expression of his 'everlasting love' (31.3). The promise that the exile will in fact be limited, that even in exile his people can find God, that God will bless his people in Judah, are secondary to God's act in seeking to turn the people to him through political disaster. It seems clear that the fall of Jerusalem was in fact such an act of God's grace.

Those who came after Jeremiah built upon what God had done for the deepening and purging of the faith of Judah

through the ministry of Jeremiah, and without his ministry their work would have been impossible. In contrasted ways Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah are Jeremiah's heirs—Ezekiel with his narrower vision but more rooted in the life of the people; Deutero-Isaiah expressing a universalism which Jeremiah's work demanded but did not reach, but which was detached from the on-going life. This, of course, is only a partial and a divided fulfilment of what God had done in the fall of Jerusalem, and its true fulfilment came in the greater Act of God in Christ Jesus.

Professor H. H. Rowley in his Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture on *The Authority of the Bible*, given in 1949, instances the Exodus as 'objective evidence that God was active in event and personality and that both belonged together'. 'Here', he says, 'we have a complex of human and non-human factors, and neither could determine the other, and *the only possible common source of both was God.*' We might add to the Exodus the other great turning-point in the history of Israel, the fall of Jerusalem (with the complex of international political events outside Judah's control, instead of nature, as the objective factor) as evidence of God's activity in event and personality, and see, with Professor Rowley, how 'the whole process culminated in the death and resurrection of Christ which were charged with demonstrably unique power'.¹

In detail we may note, first of all, that the ideas of God's judgment and mercy were not new in Jeremiah. Without the legacy of Amos, and even more of Hosea, Jeremiah would not have been the person he was. He himself clearly acknowledged his debt to his predecessors (28.8). Professor S. A. Cook went so far as to say: 'There are several important "repetitions" in the national history: the ravaging of Judah by Sennacherib in Isaiah's day and by the Babylonians a century later in the time of Jeremiah; the fall of Samaria in 721 BC and that of Jerusalem in 586 BC; the exile of the Northern Israelites at the

¹ Cf. G. A. F. Knight: *A Christian Theology of the Old Testament*, 1959, ch. 17: The Five 'Moments' in Israel's Experience.

former date and that of the Judeans at the latter.¹ There is truth here. But not only is the fall of Jerusalem the greater event; there is also the fact that whereas we contemplate the fall of Samaria at a distance, we live through the events leading up to and beyond the capture of Jerusalem. We cannot do justice to Jeremiah's personal communion with God unless we are prepared to identify ourselves to a large extent with what he believed God was doing through such a disaster.

It is rightly insisted that the prophets believed that God was Lord of history. It may be thought that the most striking expression of this in the Book of Jeremiah is the assertion in 27.6 that God has given the lands of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon. But Jeremiah's concern with Babylon and other nations is entirely a product of his concern with Judah. The lordship of God over history is most signally proclaimed in the fact that in the fall of Jerusalem he is recalling his people to trust in him and to obedience to his covenant.

Jeremiah complains in one of his outbursts (20.8): 'Whenever I speak I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!"' and this is true of his prophecies, e.g. 'For thus says the Lord, "The whole land shall be a desolation. For this the earth shall mourn and the heavens above be black; for I have spoken, I have purposed; I have not relented nor will I turn back"' (4.27 f.). Yet it is clear that the purpose of these prophecies was not to give specific information about the precise extent of the coming disaster, but that his hearers should change their ways and turn to God, and that the attempted mitigation of Jeremiah's rigour by later editors by adding, at 4.27b and elsewhere, 'Yet I will not make a full end', misses the point of this mode of utterance. There was a time when Jeremiah hoped that the threatened disaster could be avoided (36.3) but later he came to realize that this was not going to happen (13.23; contrast vv. 27 and 17). Yet as T. C. Vriezen says, 'The Old Testament always keeps proclaiming that even in passing his

¹ *The Old Testament: a Reinterpretation*, 1936, p. 172.

judgment, God is merciful. This affection of God is expressed most profoundly by the prophet Hosea, who depicts God as divided against himself, when "mercy rejoices against judgment" and ultimately God's love prevails over his just anger (Hos. 11.8 f.—a related passage is Jer. 3.19–4.4).¹

If we realize that Jeremiah lacks the abstract terminology to express his full meaning, we shall do more justice to the total impression. His fundamental hope is expressed in 4.1 f.: 'If you return, O Israel, says the Lord, to me you should return. If you remove your abominations from my presence and do not waver, and if you swear, "As the Lord lives", in truth, in justice and in uprightness, then nations shall bless themselves in him and in him shall they glory.' It is, he believes, the purpose of prophecy to turn God's people to him (23.22). And out of his experience, first of the absence of the knowledge of God in his people (5.1-5; 8.7), and then of the difficulty of himself accepting the knowledge of God (15.19), there came his prophecy of God's new covenant with his people to give them that knowledge of God from within (31.31-34).

In addition, there is the conception first of Jeremiah and then of God refining and testing his people. And, though it is set in the context of judgment, it points to that meaning which the prophecies do not quite make explicit. First Jeremiah is an assayer and tester of the people (6.27-30) then God himself 'will refine and test them' (9.7); God is asked to correct his people (10.24), and we may apply 17.10, 'I the Lord search the mind and heart,' to God's dealings with his people as well as with every man. Even the image of 'winnowing' (15.7) though found in a brutal context, adds to our total picture of God's testing action. God's purpose in all this is to heal and restore his people (8.22).

Further, there is revealed to us something of the pain in God's heart at the destruction which his people are suffering. The most striking expression of this is found in the word of warning and comfort to Baruch (ch. 45) with its contrast

¹ *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Eng. trs., 1958, p. 275.

between the pronouns: 'Behold what *I* have built *I* am breaking down, and what *I* have planted *I* am plucking up. And do *you* seek great things for yourself?' But in addition Jeremiah's compassionate denunciation (7.34) reflects something of the heart of God, just as 12.7-13 expresses God's mingled hatred and compassion for his people.

But beyond all this is the fact that Jeremiah, who loathed false optimism because of the havoc it had wrought in his people (see 23.17), and who saw 'terror on every side' and chaos come again (6.25; 4.23-26) when no one else was disturbed, as the destruction of Jerusalem became more and more certain, gave evident tokens of his confidence in God's goodness to come. In the potter's house he was certain that God could remake his people (18.6); he was confident of God's purpose of good to the exiles (24.5-7; 29.14) and that the exile would be of limited duration (25.11; 27.7); he bought a piece of land as evident witness of God's purpose to repopulate the land (32.1-15) and it may well be his prophecy that out of the north country will come a deliverance that will dwarf even the Exodus (23.7 f.).

The first service, then, that Jeremiah does for us in his public ministry is to direct our attention to the great work of God in the fall of Jerusalem and to bid us turn to him with our whole heart.

THE SECURITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Besides God the other focal point of Jeremiah's thinking was his people. No one can steep himself in Jeremiah's life without realizing how deep was Jeremiah's concern for the well-being of his people, and how he suffered because of his imaginative awareness of the disaster that was coming upon them. He uses many metaphors to describe the people of God; they are 'the first fruits of [God's] harvest' (2.3); 'a choice vine', planted by God (2.21); God's 'beloved' (11.15; 12.7);

God's 'heritage' (12.7-9); God's 'vineyard' (12.10); God's 'flock' (13.17). Though Jeremiah rarely uses the word 'covenant' (see especially 11.1-14; 31.31-34), it is the covenant relation which he sees as the purpose of his people's existence. It finds its expression in the words 'I will be your God and you shall be my people' (7.23; 11.4; 24.7; 31.33; cf. 30.22; 31.1).

Jeremiah has something to teach which is essential to any true understanding of the people of God, the Church of God. It is that the security of God's people lies nowhere else than in God himself. Concerning this he has four things to say:

(i) The security of God's people does not lie in any means of grace, however precious, considered out of relation to their function of keeping God's people in true relation to God himself. We must not think of Jeremiah as being antagonistic to the means of grace as such. He was not a lonely thinker living apart from community life. As a prophet he occupied a recognized position in society. In his teaching he presupposes God's covenant with Judah and builds upon it. He is steeped in the liturgical tradition of his people. What he does insist upon is that no institution, considered apart from its function to be an instrument whereby the covenant relationship becomes real, gives any security at all. This applies to the temple (7.1-15; 26.1-24); to the law (8.8); to sacrifice (6.20 f.; 7.21-23); to prayer (7.16; 11.14; 14.11 f.; 15.1); to circumcision (9.25 f.); to the king (21.1-23.8); and it must have been Jeremiah's thought also about the sabbath, which is why 17.19-27—the well-being of Jerusalem depends upon bearing no burdens on the sabbath day—must come from a later hand. This conviction of Jeremiah's is not negative. It is essential to the conviction that God is God. It does not belittle ecclesiastical institutions: it only sets them in their true perspective in which they glow with life and power.

(ii) Even in captivity in a foreign land the security of God's people in God himself is as certain as ever. Indeed, those who

are thus exiled, because they are free from the temptation to be self-complacent and because, being thus uprooted, they will genuinely seek God for his own sake, may well be nearer to God than those left at home, who are richer in institutions which ought to be means of grace. As belief in the territorial limitation of the power of Jahweh, the God of Judah, to his own land persisted down to the exile, the utterances of Jeremiah about this (24.1-10; 29.1-14) came as an insight with revolutionary implications. It is an enlarged conviction about the freedom of the living God to make his influence and power known to his people.

(iii) The security of God's people is only certain when, in addition to the great external covenant by which God's name is known and by which Israel is constituted as the people of God, there is added the covenant of inner response of heart and mind to God's will (31.31-34). We must not think of Jeremiah's prophecy of a New Covenant of the Knowledge of God as designed in any way to supersede the Mosaic covenant. It is meant to supplement that covenant by reinforcing it from the human side. Only when in response to God's heart and delivering grace is added the response of love and obedience with heart and mind and soul and strength is God's people secure in him.

(iv) The security of God's people tends to be threatened if those who speak in God's name to his people are not worthy of their trust. Two conditions are indispensable. They must be in personal communion, in free obedience and trust, with God himself, and what they say in God's name must be morally transforming and fit to turn the people to God if they have turned away from him. The security of God's people demands that those who speak for God shall really speak for him (see 23.9-33, especially vv. 18, 17, 22).

The second service, then, that Jeremiah does for us in his public ministry is to foster in us a deep concern for the well-being of the people of God, and to make us understand that nothing can hurt that well-being more than to give to anything

else whatever that trust and obedience which should be reserved for the living God.

JEREMIAH A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS

In 1.5 the word of the Lord is 'I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.' What did this mean in the experience of Jeremiah? Martin Buber has well said: 'The phrase "I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations" is not to be paraphrased in the words "I order thee to speak in my name to the single nations"; it means rather: "I authorize thee to declare my will *for this hour* in the history of the nations."¹ There is truth in this, but not the whole truth. It is better to think of Jeremiah, with his wonderfully practical mind, as always starting from the actual situation, and as considering other nations in so far as they were necessarily involved in God's dealing with Judah.

In five ways his ministry as a prophet to the nations was of great service:

(i) He believed right from the beginning of his ministry that trouble would break out from the north (1.13 f.), and he maintained that conviction in spite of the cost to himself (15.18; 17.14-18; 20.7-10); and once Nebuchadrezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish (46.2-12) he was quite clear and rightly clear that the conqueror from the north was Babylon. So he called Nebuchadrezzar God's 'servant' (27.6), the one to whom God had for the time being allotted the predominance of political power.

(ii) His direct ministry to the nations is best expressed in the remarkable incident recorded in 27.1-11 in which he warned the ambassadors of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon not to revolt against Babylon. They too, like Judah, will only court destruction by doing so. In comparison with this incident the genuine element in the prophecies against the nations in chs. 46-49 for the most part merely describes the

¹ *The Prophetic Faith*, 1949, p. 165.

disaster that was to be expected from opposing the power of Babylon; it adds nothing concrete.

(iii) Jeremiah prophesied that the exile would last for three generations or, in round figures, seventy years (25.11; 29.10). This was at once a warning that the exile would not be over shortly and a promise that it would not be unlimited. In 51.59-64 is recorded the incident of casting a prophecy against Babylon in the waters of the Euphrates in the fourth year of the reign of Zedekiah. As it stands, it is linked with 50.1-51.58, which comes from a later time, but it probably reflects Jeremiah's genuine conviction that Babylon too was subject to the power of the living God. It will have been made, like the purchase of the field at Anathoth (32.1-15), as a sign of God's purpose to bless his people in the days to come.

(iv) There is one prophecy in the collection made against Moab (48.11-13) which suggests the application to Moab also of the kind of testing which God had been applying to Judah. Moab has had an untroubled history (he 'has settled on his lees'), but now the tilters will tilt him, empty his casks and break his jars. Then he will discover the worthlessness of what lies at the heart of his life. There is the germ here of a belief that all nations must reckon with the touch of the living God and find their life in obedience to him.

(v) In the letter which Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Babylon (29.1-14) after the captivity of 597 BC he urged them to settle down in Babylon and not to contemplate political revolt. But he said also (v. 7), 'But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.' This is a very remarkable utterance, and is the germ of an attitude that believes that God cares for all nations and seeks their well-being. This is a revolutionary thought for ancient Israel.

So the third service that Jeremiah does for us in his public ministry is to show how a true concern for God's purpose for the people of Judah must begin to be enlarged to become a true concern for God's purpose for all peoples.

THE CHARACTER OF JEREMIAH AND HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

To his great public ministry Jeremiah added a far-reaching enrichment by revealing the working of his own mind and heart, and this, supplemented by Baruch's narrative of events in his life, gives us a more intimate knowledge of Jeremiah than we have of any other prophet.

Jeremiah discloses to us six main characteristics: truthfulness, courage, a hatred of the morally unworthy, an acute sensitiveness, a warm humanity, and a serene confidence in God's purpose for the future.

First of all, and the foundation of everything else, is the utter truthfulness of his personal relation with God. His initial shrinking (1.6) is not only due to the greatness of the task and his inexperience, but also because he knows that if he responds he will be content with nothing less than the truth. At two critical points in his life (28.11 f.; 42.7) he deliberately paused in order that he should be quite sure what God wanted him to say. He could not stand the easy way in which other prophets spoke glibly of God's will without going through the arduous discipline of discovering what it really was (23.18-28). In his personal communion with God he raised the hardest questions he knew against God's truth in order that he might lay hold of rock bottom truth that persisted through all questioning. 'Why does the way of the wicked prosper?' (12.1). 'Why do all of them curse me?' (15.10-12). 'Wilt thou be to me like a deceitful brook?' (15.18). 'Is evil a recompense for good?' (18.20). What he said in God's name was in harsh contrast to his own inclination (17.16). He faced the possibility that his prophecy in God's name was completely and utterly false (20.7). And he found in personal communion with God that which cleansed him both of resistance and self-pity: 'Thus says the Lord: if you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and

not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them' (15.19; cf. 12.5).

Secondly, we find in Jeremiah an immense courage to do what was right, unhesitatingly provoking hostility by doing so and unflinchingly enduring the results of that hostility. No one can read Jeremiah's prophecies and think them the cautious product of a time-server. They are stinging words, probing the very root of what was wrong with Judah, and they were bound to create opposition. Everyone who reads the record of Jeremiah's actions in prophesying the destruction of the temple (7.1-15; ch. 26), in publishing the scroll of his prophecies and deliberately opposing King Jehoiakim (ch. 36), in opposing nationalistic prophecy (23.9-33; 27.16-22; chs. 28-29), in warning King Zedekiah to surrender to the Babylonians (34.1-7; 37.1-10, 16-19; 38.17-23) and in telling the remnant in Judah that they ought not to go to Egypt (42.1-43.7) must realize that he was a man of remarkable courage. It is true that on urgent and insistent advice from the political leaders of Judah, he went into hiding (36.16-19, 26) for a period. But when we consider that he endured a plot against his own life by his family and friends at Anathoth (11.18-12.6), a similar plot instigated by the priests and prophets (18.18-23), trial for treason (26.7-19), a night in the stocks (20.1-6), imprisonment during the siege of Jerusalem, most of it under conditions that threatened his life (37.1-38.28), and that he was dragged off to Egypt, probably against his will, by those who refused to listen to him (43.1-7), and that none of this had any power whatsoever to deter him from doing what he thought he ought to do, we realize that his courage was entirely unbreakable.

Beyond this, we find in Jeremiah a hatred of what is morally debilitating, coupled with a desire for vindication which passes over into a desire for vengeance on his enemies. What Jeremiah hated about the false prophets was not only that they spoke easily in the name of God without listening, but, even more, that this kind of prophesying sapped the moral integrity of

Judah and took away all hope of recovery (23.17). We also find in Jeremiah's period of uncertainty a strong desire that what he has been affirming in his prophecies about God's purposes towards Judah shall be vindicated. This is the truth that lies behind his prayers for vengeance. To God Jeremiah has committed his cause (11.20, repeated in 20.12) and he prays that he may not be put to shame (17.18). This plea is entirely justified. But it comes to us in the context of a plea for vengeance on his enemies (12.3; 15.15; 17.18; 20.12) which is not justified, nor purged away in Jeremiah's communion with God, and which in 18.21-23 expresses itself in harsh and horrible terms. We must frankly recognize this as a blemish on Jeremiah's character, not perceived and transformed in his communion with God, and one that may have repercussions in limiting his true influence when his followers developed the thought, quite foreign to Jeremiah himself, of retaliation on Judah's enemies (see especially 50.28; 51.5 f., 10, 11, 24-37, 48-50, 54-57).

Fourthly, there is in Jeremiah an acute sensitiveness both to the plight of his people (8.18-9.1, and cf. 4.19-21, 23 f.; 12.7-13) and thereafter in his own spirit (cf. especially 20.14-18). In one sense, he was not the type to be a prophet of judgment. Jeremiah loved every stick and stone of his native land, and was at home with its birds and beasts, and knew every phase of its life (see 1.11; 2.23, 31; 4.7, 11; 5.6; 6.29; 7.11, 18, 34; 8.7; 12.5; 14.6; 17.8, 11; 18.3, 4, 14; 22.6). His love of his country made him describe the approaching destruction, which he saw long before anyone else, in terms of acute anguish; and while in public he was as firm as a rock, in private afterwards he had to pay the penalty. On one occasion he was even driven to despair of his life and wonder if it would not have been better if he had never been born at all (20.14-18).

But this sensitiveness is the other side of a warm humanity which is aware of the whole of life, and is full of joy, and awakens and sustains friendships. The frankness of Jeremiah's

avowals have done him a disservice, because they have been taken too literally and have been given too large a place. It is true that Jeremiah came to feel that he ought not to marry (16.1-4) and to be extremely sensitive to the way in which his ministry set him apart from the joys and sorrows of his people (16.5-9). It is true that he felt forbidden to pray (7.16; 11.14; 14.11 f.; 15.1) and that he spoke of his isolation (15.19). Yet whatever the reason was why Jeremiah did not marry, it was not for lack of generous humanity, and the statements on his loneliness should not be taken with any greater literalness than his statements on the sinfulness of his people (cf. 5.1-5). His enjoyment of life is abundantly manifest (7.34; 16.9; 25.10); God's words to him were in essence 'a joy and the delight of his life' (15.16), and the description of a man who trusts in God (17.7 f.), 'He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green', is true to our total impression of what Jeremiah was like. He won the devotion and sacrificial loyalty of his secretary Baruch (see 32.12; 36.32) and in turn cared for him (45.1-5); he won the respect and affection of Ahikam and his influential family (26.24); the attitude of the political leaders towards him and Baruch (26.10-19; 36.11-19, 25) is one of cordial goodwill and respect; the ambassadors of the surrounding nations listened to him (27.1-11); the new high priest Zephaniah was his friend (29.24-32); in prison an Ethiopian palace chamberlain risked his life to give him decent treatment (38.7-13); and King Zedekiah in his weakness wanted to lean upon Jeremiah's strength (37.16-21; 38.14-28).

Lastly, there is in Jeremiah, increasingly towards the end of his life as we know it, confidence in God's purpose for the future. By the first captivity (597 bc) Jeremiah's hesitation at accepting God's truth, and distress at his people's plight and in his own spirit, had been overcome. Under the shadow of a greater impending disaster, Jeremiah, in the face of general despair, finds grounds for great encouragement. His only hope

of avoiding disaster lies in surrender to Babylon, and that King Zedekiah will not consistently accept—but he deliberately testifies to God's purpose of blessing for the land of Judah (32.1-15) as he had testified shortly before to God's purpose of good for the exiles in Babylon (29.1-14). It is a great pity that Jeremiah was not given a larger opportunity to work out constructive proposals for his people, but that he had the spirit to do so is abundantly clear. To the end he remains undefeated, a confident witness for God.

THE PERMANENT TRUTH IN THE NON-JEREMIANIC MATERIAL

There is no reason why the material which ought to be labelled 'non-Jeremianic' in the Book of Jeremiah should not be intrinsically valuable. By 'Jeremianic' is meant either poetry and prose from Jeremiah himself, or authentic accounts of his words and actions. In point of fact, however, apart from giving evidence to the historian of attitudes of mind present in the later history of Israel, there is little of first-rate importance. We may divide the material into three groups—valuable, pleasant and harmful. In the first group we may note the section on the greatness of God (10.1-16), and two passages which deal with the bringing of the nations to share in the worship of Israel's God (12.14-17; 16.19-21); if 17.5-8 on the difference which trust in God makes and 23.7 f. on the new Exodus should *not* be ascribed to Jeremiah, then these are here, as they would be if ascribed to Jeremiah, very valuable. The Deuteronomistic formulae that Judah deserved the exile are, in their way, useful (5.18 f.; 9.12-16; 16.10-13; 22.8 f.); and the historical record of Gedaliah's governorship (40.7-41.18) and the historical appendix (ch. 52) are valuable as history, if they do not add to the Book of Jeremiah (granted the presence of 39.1-10) anything that is essential.

The prophecies of restoration which do not come from

Jeremiah are often pleasant, such as 3.14-18; 30.18-22; 31.7-14, 23-25, 27 f.; 33.10-13; but much of the supplementary material must be described as harmful—falling into the categories of legalism (17.19-27; 33.14-26); false security (31.35-37; 33.1-9); offensive delight in destruction for its own sake (46.10; 47.6 f.; 48.10; 50.21-26), and retaliation (25.27-29, 30 f., 33; 50.28; 51.5 f., 10, 11, 24, 34-37, 49-53, 54-57). Those who did us great service by transmitting the legacy of Jeremiah did not always understand or share the spirit of their master.

TRADITIONS WHICH GREW AROUND JEREMIAH

Legends gathered round Jeremiah in proportion to the greatness of his impact upon his people, though they are in themselves of little value. They begin with the Chronicler, who stresses the part played by Jeremiah in the closing years of the kingdom (II Chron. 36.12, 21, 22—the last verse repeated as Ezra 1.1) and in particular that he lamented for King Josiah. ‘Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these an ordinance in Israel, behold they are written in the Laments’ (II Chron. 35.25). This is the basis for the tradition that Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations, which is the product of many hands, differs markedly in style and content from Jeremiah’s own thinking, and because it comes from a later time was not included among the prophets but only became part of the third section of the Hebrew Canon (the Writings). Yet in the LXX the book is prefaced by the statement: ‘And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said . . .’

The Apocrypha contains *The Letter of Jeremiah*, which is an impassioned sermon on the marginal comment against idol-worship inserted in 10.11, and also the *Book of Baruch*,

which is alleged to be written by Baruch in Babylon five years after the fall of Jerusalem and read by him to King Jehoiachin. In the *Second Book of Maccabees* are two legends, one that Jeremiah gave instructions to hide the sacred fire, told the exiles to keep God's law, hid the tent, the ark, and the altar of incense in a cave on Mount Nebo, and warned his followers that the place would remain unknown until the Jews were gathered together again, and the glory of the Lord revealed (2.2-8); the other that Judas Maccabeus encouraged his followers by telling them of his vision of Jeremiah, described as 'a man who loves the brethren and prays much for the people and the holy city', giving him a golden sword so that he can strike down his adversaries (15.15 f.). I Esd. 1.28 insists that Josiah's death at Megiddo was due to his disregarding Jeremiah's explicit warning, and II Esd. 2.18, which comes from a Christian author, promises, in the name of God, the help of 'my servants Isaiah and Jeremiah' to God's people in time of need.

In the Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch*, which comes from the second half of the first century AD, Jeremiah, whose works are said to be to Jerusalem as a firm pillar and his prayers as a strong wall, is told to retire from the city during the siege. The veil, the ark, the mercy seat, the two tables, the priests' clothing, the altar of incense, and the forty-eight stones which adorned the high priest are hidden by angels. Jeremiah is to support the captivity in Babylon, but Baruch is to remain in Jerusalem. Other Jewish legends are that when Nebuchadrezzar conquered Egypt (which did not in fact happen) he took Jeremiah and Baruch to Babylon (Seder 'Olam Rabba 26), and that in Babylonia Baruch gave instruction to Ezra (Midrash Rabba on Song of Songs 5.5; Megilla 16b).

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37-100) confirms the account given in Jer. 43.6 f. that both Jeremiah and Baruch went to Egypt (*Antiquities* 10.9.6) and refers to a prophecy by Jeremiah that the temple would be rebuilt (10.7.3; 11.1.1 f.).

From Christian sources comes the tradition that Jeremiah was stoned in Egypt. It may have originated as an inference from Matt. 23.37=Luke 13.34. Tertullian mentions it casually in his anti-Gnostic treatise *Scorpiace* (an antidote for the scorpion's sting), section 8; and Jerome repeats it (*Adversus Jovinianum* 2.37), though, in saying that it happened when Jeremiah 'announced the captivity', he makes an obvious slip, because in his *Commentary on Isaiah* he tells us that Jeremiah and Baruch died in Egypt before Nebuchadrezzar invaded it. We have, in fact, no reliable information about what happened to Jeremiah and Baruch after the fall of Jerusalem except what we can learn from the Book of Jeremiah.

THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH IN THE SETTING OF THE BIBLE

Jeremiah speaks to us out of a central position in the life of the Old Testament. He is greatly indebted to his predecessors, and he has far-reaching influence on all who come after him. As we listen to him we are especially conscious that he presupposes Amos' prophecies of judgment upon God's people arising out of their covenant relation to him (Amos 3.2), and also Amos' treatment of sacrifice (Amos 5.21-26); he shares Hosea's response to the deep emotional involvement between God and his people, his emphasis on the happiness of the wilderness period (Hos. 2.15); his condemnation of apostasy as adultery (Hos. 2.1-13), and his discernment of the absence of the knowledge of God as the root of the trouble (Hos. 4.1, 6; 5.4; 6.6). He presupposes also Isaiah's certainty that the security of God's people is in God himself, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a foundation, a stone, a tested stone, a precious corner stone, of a sure foundation: "He who believes will not be in haste"' (Isa. 28.16), and also how that certainty had come to be interpreted. Behind him, too, lies the original

form of the Book of Deuteronomy with its insistence on love and obedience to the one true God (Deut. 6.4-9) and the repercussions of that book in the Josianic Reformation of 621 BC. Yet this is no pedestrian accumulation by an unimaginative mind, because Jeremiah transmutes all he borrows, in the light of the immense events of his own time and in the light of his own personal communion with God.

So, too, he himself deeply influences all that follows—first of all his contrasted heirs—his younger contemporary Ezekiel who shared with him the sense of God's judgment in the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek. 11.1-13) and looked forward to a new heart in God's people (Ezek. 36.22-32), but who, as he vindicated the prophetic tradition, narrowed and hardened it; and the unknown prophet of the exile who gave glorious expression to Jeremiah's nascent universalism in his great conception of the Servant of the Lord (Isa. 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12) for which Jeremiah provided perhaps the finest Old Testament model.

As Jeremiah was influenced by the initial form of the Book of Deuteronomy, so he influenced its further development, and his own dialogues with God influenced the development of the Psalms both in the honesty of their outpouring of human problems to God (see Pss. 73, 22, 88) and also unfortunately in their asking for vengeance on their enemies (see Pss. 31, 44, 63). The personal element in Jeremiah's record and the fact that he, apparently about the same time as Habakkuk (Hab. 1.13) raised the question 'Why do the wicked prosper?' (12.1) prepared the way for the Book of Job.

By the time of the Book of Daniel, which was written in the second quarter of the second century BC, the Book of Jeremiah was considered part of the Canon of Scripture, and the author set an unhappy precedent for the wrong attitude to Scripture by re-interpreting Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would last for seventy years (Jer. 25.11; 29.10; see Dan. 9.1 f. and cf. II Chron. 36.20 f.) to adapt it to a time-sequence

for God's action that would make the fulfilment of the promise contemporary.

It should be noted that in the Book of Sirach in the Apocrypha (49.4-7) a fair summary is given of Jeremiah's ministry; the fall of Jerusalem is ascribed to the sin of the kings in forsaking the law and the Most High, and Jeremiah's consecration as a prophet and his afflictions in that service are linked with it.

In the New Testament there are many echoes of the Book of Jeremiah, but the important specific references are three. It is of decisive importance for Christian faith and for the understanding of true religion, that Jesus himself felt compelled, as Jeremiah had done, to predict the destruction of the temple (Jer. 7.15; cf. C. H. Dodd, who says, 'Although there is no echo of language, in substance the forecast of the destruction of the temple in Mark 13.2 is similar.'¹) Additional evidence that Jesus had pondered on this prophecy of Jeremiah's is to be found in the fact that in the cleansing of the temple he combined the language of Jer. 7.11 with that of Isa. 56.7: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a den of robbers' (Mark 11.17; Matt. 21.13; Luke 19.46). In this Jesus identified himself with Jeremiah's teaching that security for God's people can only lie in God himself. So in the making of the Christian revelation, as subsequently in Christian history, the breaking of false securities was necessary in order that the true security of God's people in God should be rightly established.

Besides the prophecy of the destruction of the temple, Jeremiah's prophecy of a New Covenant (31.31-4) has contributed richly to the New Testament understanding of its own message, though its complete fulfilment belongs to the final victory of God's kingdom. Jesus used it to focus the distinctive thing which came into being in his life, death and resurrection (I Cor. 11.25), and St Paul in II Corinthians expressed in terms consonant with it the meaning of the new life in

¹ *According to the Scriptures*, 1952, p. 86.

Christ. The Letter to the Hebrews also called attention to its importance by quoting the prophecy twice (Heb. 8.8-12; 10.16 f.).

Further, Matthew, in reporting the current opinions as to who Jesus might be, includes Jeremiah (Matt. 16.14): 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' There was no tradition associating Jeremiah with the Messiah who was to come, and for that reason there is real insight in this linking of Jesus with Jeremiah.

While Jesus is sharply opposed to Jeremiah in his command to love our enemies (Matt. 5.43-48) he is like him in his sorrow over his people's resistance to God (Matt. 23.37-39) and in his resolute provoking of opposition when it is necessary to his ministry (Mark 3.16; John 11.47-53) and in his unhesitating acceptance of the results of that opposition (Mark 14.26-15.30; John 18.1-19.30). Jeremiah, in his greatness and with his limitations, contributed richly, by his life as well as by his words, to that background which was taken up and transmuted in the supreme action of God in history in Jesus Christ our Lord. And as we live by faith in that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our faith is deepened and enriched as we continue to learn from his servant Jeremiah.

PART ONE

THE POETRY AND PREACHING
OF JEREMIAH

1.1-25.38

JEREMIAH'S CALL

1.1-19

This chapter contains the two most important elements which lay behind Jeremiah's ministry. They are: first, the action of God in bringing disaster upon his people because of their WICKEDNESS (which includes political folly as well as religious disloyalty and insufficiency); and, second, the responsive prophetic activity of Jeremiah, in which his hesitations and resistance are overcome so that he becomes an IRON PILLAR in God's service. (If there is secondary expansion in the chapter, it is still substantially true to Jeremiah's experience.)

INTRODUCTION

1.1-3

These verses may come from Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary (see 32.12). If so, they represent his headings to the two collections of Jeremiah's prophecies that he made. The first two verses are the heading to the enlarged scroll rewritten after King Jehoiakim had burnt the first scroll read to the people, to the princes, and to the king (36.1-32). Verse 3 is the additional heading for Baruch's collection of Jeremiah's later prophecies and disclosures up to the fall of Jerusalem. Nothing has been added as a preface to the whole book.

3. Here are mentioned the three most important kings under whom Jeremiah lived—Josiah the reforming king (638-608 BC); Jehoiakim, the capable but cynical king (608-597 BC); and Zedekiah, the well-intentioned but weak king (597-587 BC). The other two kings, Jehoahaz (608 BC) and Jehoiachin

(597 BC) reigned for only three months each, and are not considered worthy of mention here. Though Jehoahaz receives only brief mention in the book (22.10-12) Jehoiachin is far more influential in the story (see the comment at 13.18 f.).

Some scholars think that the date given here for Jeremiah's call, the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah (626 BC) is in reality the date of his birth. This view does not do justice to the immense variety of Jeremiah's thought, nor to those passages which may refer to the Josianic reformation. It is, however, true that the references to the reign of Josiah are not as explicit as we would like, and that the public ministry of Jeremiah found at least its main expression in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

Jeremiah was a common Hebrew name (see 35.3; 52.1; Neh. 10.2; I Chron. 5.24). It probably means 'Jahweh exalts'. Jeremiah's father, Hilkiyah, is not the Hilkiyah of II Kings 22.8 who 'found the book of the law in the house of the Lord'. He may have been a descendant of Abiathar the priest, who was banished on the accession of King Solomon to Anathoth, the modern Anata, a village three or four miles north-north-east of Jerusalem where Jeremiah was born (see I Kings 2.26 f.; I Sam. 22.20; 14.3; Jos. 21.18).

The fact that Jeremiah came from a priestly family may be responsible for some of the pungency of his criticism of the priests as well as the prophets (5.31; 6.13; 23.11; 26.8-11; 29.26), which in turn may have provoked the plot against his life by his family and friends at Anathoth (11.18-23).

GOD CALLS JEREMIAH TO BE A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS 1.4-10

The call itself, and there is no reason to suppose that the account of it comes from anybody but Jeremiah, is expressed in terms of simple conversation between God and Jeremiah,

and is very like the call of Amos (Amos 7.10-17). It is very different from the vision of Isaiah of the throne of God surrounded by the seraphim (Isa. 6) and from the complicated vision of the divine glory that came to Ezekiel (Ezek. 1.1-3.15).

4. the word of the Lord came to me

This is the heart of the prophetic experience. Jeremiah is confronted by God in such a way that he is convinced with new decisive insight that God's truth and God's authority are supreme. Because in Hebrew psychology physical parts have psychical functions, and the part is taken as a whole, we must understand that it is indeed God himself who meets Jeremiah in his word. (For the symbolism of God's hand as expressing the same truth, see 15.17.) In responding to the truth that has come to him through this dynamic meeting with God, Jeremiah is empowered by it.

5. before I formed you in the womb I knew you

God's relation to Jeremiah takes precedence over all other relations. It was first in time. When Jeremiah responded to God's call he realized that God had been shaping his life from the very beginning. Compare the experience of the Servant (Isa. 49.1, 5), of the Psalmist (Ps. 139.13-16) and of St Paul (Gal. 1.15). We may vary the metaphor and say that it was rooted in a deeper level of Jeremiah's being than all other experiences. His life is a demonstration that the first claim upon him was the claim of God. Nothing could shake that or subordinate it to lesser things.

a prophet to the nations

Amos and Isaiah prophesied to the nations before Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk as his contemporaries, and Ezekiel after him. It would have been altogether strange if Jeremiah had not done the same. No one in his situation could avoid being aware first of Assyria, then of Babylon in the north, Egypt in the south, and the smaller nations round

about. And God, whose word he proclaimed, was Lord of all nations (see the Introduction).

6. God's word to Jeremiah found him reluctant to accept it—he shrank from the searching nature of God's truth, and in addition the pull of his own nature was in a direction opposite to that of the word of God. Moses in a similar situation (Ex. 4.10) was hesitant because of his natural deficiencies as a speaker. Jeremiah here seems to plead inexperience. It was not merely inexperience, however, that made Jeremiah hesitate, but the shrinking of his sensitive nature (v. 8), which had to be toughened to enable him to accept God's truth and to do God's will. Jeremiah's reluctance was overcome by the empowering word of God. He must not give way to his fears, for the very essence of knowing God is to know his delivering power. The eternal God is the supreme authority and power in the universe, and his servants know the strength and stay of his presence.

9. then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth

Jeremiah had the vivid experience, natural in Hebrew psychology,¹ that God had made his mouth an instrument fit to speak God's words. There is an implied condition (which is made explicit at 15.19), but the promise to be God's mouth remains, and it is this assurance which is to give Jeremiah confidence in the midst of his anguish of spirit (cf. Deut. 18.18).

10. (Cf. 24.6; 42.10; 45.4.) Jeremiah is to declare, with God's authority, God's purposes that involve the nations round about, as well as the kingdom of Judah. Because of God's authority Jeremiah's word is full of power. (In Hebrew thought prophecy effected its own fulfilment; see Isa. 55.10 f.; Ezek. 37.1-14; Zech. 5.1-4; Heb. 4.12 f.) That power is both destructive and constructive. Through the particular situation in which Jere-

miah was placed, the negative side of his ministry is prominent; yet this destructive aspect is always in the service of God's covenant love for his people, and it is this which gives meaning to the words of judgment (see the Introduction and cf. John 3.16 f.).

THE VISION OF THE ALMOND SHOOT:
GOD IS READY TO ACT
1.11-12

Jeremiah saw the shoot (RSV rod) of an almond tree. It looked completely dead, but he knew that in it was the stirring of a new life. (Some have thought that the almond shoot must have been sending out new signs of life, but there is no need to suppose this.) The apparently dead almond shoot is like the world that Jeremiah knew, in which there seemed no signs that God was alive. 'What is God doing?' The answer that came to Jeremiah was, 'I am watching over my word to perform it.' The Hebrew for 'almond tree' is *shaked*, and for 'watching' is *shoked*. This play upon words is a trick of Hebrew style. Though we ourselves would not use word-play as a means of expressing our deepest convictions, this habit should not trouble us. It is just an instance of the universal practice of making use of current idiom for effective utterance.

The meaning of Jeremiah's vision is true also for us. The initial conviction of Hebrew faith is that this is God's world and that he is active in it. Our understanding of the world is infinitely more complicated than Jeremiah's, but we must share his conviction that God is active in and carrying out his purposes for his world. And this conviction must hold us firmly, even when the external evidence appears all against it.

¹ See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, 1946, p. 183.

THE VISION OF THE BOILING POT: THROUGH AN
ENEMY FROM THE NORTH GOD WILL PUNISH
JUDAH FOR ITS WICKEDNESS
1.13-16

Jeremiah's second vision was of a boiling pot which was fanned from the north or tipped up on that side. The general meaning is perfectly plain, but the Hebrew is obscure. Trouble was to break upon Judah OUT OF THE NORTH—the quarter from which disaster so often came. (If Jeremiah expected this immediately, he was wrong. It was nearly twenty years before anything happened to suggest that he was right, and forty years before the final disaster under Babylon in 587 BC.) The tribes of the north would conquer Jerusalem, setting up their thrones at the gates of the city, and dispensing justice here to the inhabitants of Judah. If this is not a precise picture of what happened, the reality (see 39.1-10) was grim enough.

In this vision Jeremiah was reinforcing the prophetic tradition in which he stood (cf. 28.8; Amos 3.2; 8.2; Hos. 4.9; Isa. 10.5-11) that judgment was to come on God's unworthy people. This is pressed home upon us both by the fact that the book takes us through the events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, and also by the variety and persistence of Jeremiah's images for the coming doom.

In such a vision political and religious issues are intertwined far more closely than they can be for us (see the Introduction, pp. 21 f., 'The Nature of Theocracy'). Judah needed political wisdom and the lack of it would bring her to disaster. Uncertainty about and disloyalty to her distinctive covenant with God only aggravated her political instability. At the same time, Judah needed deliverance from the corruption of her religious inheritance, and a new discovery of God's commission to be the bearer of his revelation to his world. In the political instability of Jeremiah's time, Judah had to rediscover her religious tradition or she would not possess it.

We, too, in our own day need true political wisdom and faithfulness to God's revelation of himself, and the right interaction between the two. Without these, the disaster which Jeremiah predicted for his day is near at hand for us too.

GOD WILL MAKE JEREMIAH STRONG
1.17-19

Here is what God asked of his prophet and what he made of him. He must be ready to do God's will, and in God's service he must not give way to his fears, or God himself will bring disaster upon him. There can be no half measures about trusting God. To serve him on a basis of half-belief means certain failure. In face of opposition we must fling ourselves utterly upon God. Jeremiah did so, and God made him invincible.

A price had to be paid for this. But it happened. And it was clearly a triumph over all his anguish. Throughout his ministry Jeremiah's conviction that the power of God was with him gave him the resources with which to overcome even the depths of blank despair (20.14-18).

GOD IS BRINGING DISASTER UPON JUDAH

(Early prophecies)

2.1-6.30

These chapters come, in the opinion of most scholars, from the reign of Josiah. In any event they are prophecies from the early part of his ministry. They contain some of his most memorable poetry.

Do these chapters refer to a condition of abnormal apostasy, or do they refer to a sin-infected relation between man and God, with which at all times man must reckon? Both possibilities must be kept in mind. Undoubtedly the historical situation which Jeremiah faced was peculiarly critical, yet the prophetic exaggeration which Jeremiah uses to drive home the horrible character of sin makes real to us an ever-present danger. The use of language for this purpose is true, not only of Jeremiah's teaching but also of the Sermon on the Mount.

The term 'Israel' may mean *either* both northern and southern kingdoms, *or* the northern kingdom as opposed to Judah, *or* Judah alone as representing the continuing people of God.

ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS TO GOD

2.1-3.5

ISRAEL'S EARLY DEVOTION

2.1-3

Jeremiah followed Hosea (Hos. 2.2-20; 9.10; 11.1) in looking back to the period of the Exodus as the time of Israel's joyous faithfulness. The idea that Israel was rebellious from the start becomes explicit in Ezekiel (cf. Ezek 20.5-9). Israel was a bride

happy to go with her husband in spite of the hardships and the uncultivated land. Such a backward look to a time of real trust and affection is essential in the renewal of faith.

The word translated DEVOTION (AV KINDNESS, Hebrew *chesed*, cf. 3.12 and 9.23 f.) is one of the great words of the Old Testament. It is used of the faithfulness of God and also that of Israel, and expresses the heart of the covenant bond which persists in spite of Israel's uncertain loyalty. Here love and obedience come together.

3. Israel was holy

That is, set apart for God. Her devotion was THE FIRST FRUITS OF HIS HARVEST. Anyone molesting Israel would incur the punishment that follows sacrilege. This last idea is a natural implication of a limited understanding of the meaning of the election of Israel; but in the context of the whole Bible it is clear that election means not freedom from molestation but the opportunity of entering into the redeeming purposes of God.

ISRAEL HAS TURNED AWAY FROM THE LIVING GOD 2.4-13

It was not because of any fault that they found in God that Israel turned from him, the living God, to deities that are worthless. Yet the gods in which Israel now trusts are intrinsically nothing, and worship of them has emptied out all Israel's strength. (The word translated WORTHLESSNESS means literally 'breath' and then 'nothingness'.)

But it was he, Jahweh, the God of the covenant by which they still live, who brought Israel out of Egypt—a journey described in language that has grown into a tradition. The repeated question which should have been asked (vv. 6, 8), 'Where is Jahweh?' is a liturgical formula meant to bind the

present moment and the historical revelation into a living unity. He brought Israel into the promised land, his inheritance (cf. Ps. 79.1), and Israel has defiled this by her disloyalty.

8. The leaders of the people—priests, lawgivers, prophets—have led them astray. They have not known the God whose covenant gave their life meaning. (The prophets are said to have prophesied by Baal. This is attributed in 23.13 to the prophets of Samaria. Jeremiah's general indictment of the prophets is not that, but rather that they have not listened to the God they profess to serve.) To know God (as the Old Testament understands this) is to know and to respond to him with our whole being. It is lack of knowledge of God that is to cause Jeremiah so much anguish of spirit; and it is to meet this need with a true knowledge of God that the promise of a new covenant will be made (cf. 4.22; 5.4; 8.7; 9.3, 6, 24; 16.21; 24.7; 31.34). One of the characteristics of biblical faith is to think that the official representatives of religion are at least as likely to pervert the inner meaning of God's revelation as anybody else. This attitude does not discredit these official representatives, but it makes them justify their position in terms not of their status, but of their fidelity to God's revelation.

9-11. So God brings an indictment against his people (not AV 'plead with'). From east to west nothing like this has ever happened before. Whereas people with nature-gods hold fast to their allegiance, Israel has turned away from the living God to what is useless and unsatisfying. By GLORY is meant not any one attribute of Jahweh, but his whole being, his essential greatness. The living God is the real glory of men, and they lessen their own worth in turning away from him. Jeremiah would not have been disconcerted to find that the study of the history of religion showed that peoples changed their gods, because the difference between one nature-god and another

is negligible. The issue is not logical but moral. The demands which such gods make on human nature can be fulfilled without difficulty. The saving God of Israel's faith demanded a total allegiance which it was not easy to give. Yet disloyalty to the one true God remains appalling. And substitutes for him are most unsatisfying.

12-13. For the appeal to nature to share in the people's horror cf. Isa. 1.2, and for the fulfilment of the image of God as the giver of the water of life cf. John 4.7-15; 7.37-39.

BE WARNED BY THE RESULTS OF
DISOBEDIENCE
2.14-19

Israel once was free from slavery and HOLY TO THE LORD. Now she is in slavery again. Assyria has devastated the land and Egypt has stripped it bare. There is nothing to choose between Egypt and Assyria. Both involve political slavery and religious disobedience. Will Judah go the same way as the northern kingdom? Disaster will make it plain what an evil thing it is to forsake the living God. The lions refer to Assyria; Memphis (AV Noph) is the famous capital of lower Egypt, and Tahpanhes is the Greek Daphnae Pelusii, modern Tell-el-Defenneh, a fortress on the eastern branch of the Nile (see 43.7). For Shihor and 'the river' in the AV, the RSV rightly gives the Nile and the Euphrates. The reference is probably to the destruction of the northern kingdom in 721 BC (II Kings 18.9-12).

The factors which brought down the northern kingdom—political instability and religious unsoundness—are likely to work the same havoc on the southern kingdom. Will Judah learn from what has happened, and see in it a call to renewal of its religious loyalty and the political wisdom that goes with it?

THE DEEP ROOTS OF SIN 2.20-22

This evil is of old standing, and comes from the abandonment of restraint on selfish desire. God's true vine has become a rank weed. This sin cannot be washed off. It is ingrained. Disloyalty to the living God is treated as unfaithfulness to the marriage bond between God and his people. But, in addition, Israelite worship had been influenced by the licentious character of Canaanite rites. The vine is often used in the Old Testament as a symbol of Israel (cf. 12.10-13; Hos. 10.1; Isa. 5.1-7; Ezek. 17.1-10), and this received a new meaning when Jesus Christ was seen as the true vine, the source of life in the new Israel (John 15.1-8). Unhappily the vine is degenerate, and the sin is not surface evil which can easily be washed away. An echo of the last thought may be found in the outcry of Macbeth:

‘Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No; this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.’

and the later moaning of Lady Macbeth:

‘Here’s the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of
Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.’¹

THE PURSUIT OF STRANGE GODS MUST END IN DISAPPOINTMENT 2.23-28

In view of what they do in the Valley of Hinnom, how can the people say that they are not defiled by idolatrous wor-

¹ *Macbeth*, Act II Scene ii and Act V Scene i.

ship? In their search for strange gods they are like a she-camel or a wild ass driven by uncontrollable desire. They let their feet become sore and their throat become dry running after strange gods, and they say: 'IT IS HOPELESS. We cannot do anything else.' But in a crisis they turn back to God as a last resort, and their false trust in idols—one, in fact for every city in Judah—is exposed as unworthy, for the idols are powerless to help. (The Valley of Hinnom was notorious as the place where children were sacrificed by fire; see 7.29-34.)

Jeremiah's confident appeal against all substitutes for the living God emphasizes two facts—their moral unworthiness and their powerlessness to help. We, who stand on the greater ground of Christ, must be equally sure of these two things. Of the moral grandeur revealed in Christ Jesus there can be no doubt, but we must be as certain of God's power to help. The help that God gives comes in two ways—his renewal of those who trust in him, and his giving them confidence that he is in control of the historical process. We must stand with Jeremiah in his insistence on the disappointment which awaits those whose faith is not set on God.

THE EVIL OF UNACKNOWLEDGED SIN

2.29-37

29-30. It is no use complaining against God—the fault is not his but Judah's. No lesson has been learnt from political disaster: instead, the prophets who might have led Judah in God's way have been put to death. The mention of the killing of the prophets is a reference to the sinister happenings in the reign of Manasseh (693-639 BC). See II Kings 21.16; 24.4; cf. also I Kings 10.10; Neh. 9.26; Matt. 23.37.

31. The history of God's relations with his people opens up a clear purposeful way of living. It cannot be compared to A

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clearly the difficulty to be overcome in man's fellowship with God. Israel cannot say that she has returned to God, and keep on sinning. (For WILL HE RETURN TO HER? read with LXX 'Will she return to him again?' and for LAND read 'woman'.)

The law against remarriage of a divorced wife is given in Deut. 24.1-4. But the written code is not necessarily presupposed here. Well-established custom must have preceded it and, in any case, broken loyalties are not easily re-established.

2-3. Israel has waited for her lovers as assiduously as a Bedouin bandit waits for his victims. She has been punished for this because the rains have not come. Yet she remains shameless and brazen. Disloyalty to God is now so much a part of her daily life that the horror of it does not move her.

On the withholding of the rains see 14.1-10 and compare Amos 4.6-12 and Deut. 11.10-17, and contrast Matt. 5.45. Old Testament conviction discerned the result of disloyalty to God in the immediate unfavourableness of nature. The results of disloyalty are certain, but today we cannot believe with people of an earlier time that they are so easily discerned.

4. The term FATHER was sometimes used by a young girl of her husband. The easy expression of regret which carries with it no intention of doing differently cannot deceive God. No understanding of the meaning of divine forgiveness as taught in either Testament can make it an easy condonation of wrongdoing.

THE NORTHERN AND THE SOUTHERN KINGDOMS 3.6-18

This whole section breaks the continuity between 3.5 and 3.19.

WILDERNESS . . . OR A LAND OF THICK DARKNESS. But to those who do not want to see God, this guidance is a dark and hopeless direction from which they must break free to follow their own judgment.

32-35. A bride's sash marked her status as a married woman. Though no woman would forget her proper adornment, Judah constantly forgets her obligation to the marriage bond with Jahweh. If faithfulness is possible in a lesser thing, why not in the supreme loyalty of life? But Judah is ungrateful, skilled in attracting lovers and in oppressing the innocent. Protestations of innocence only increase the guilt. Inability to be ashamed of evil means hardening in sin (cf. John 9.41). (The Hebrew of v. 34 is obscure.)

36. Trust in Egypt as well as in Assyria will be brought to nothing, for God will not give prosperity to these substitutes for his way. Judah's political instability is a sign of her religious disloyalty.

37. Hands on the head express shame and unhappiness; cf. II Sam. 13.19.

RETURN TO GOD MEANS ALTERATION OF LIFE 3.1-5

1. A wife who now belongs to another man cannot return to her former husband, and does Israel who has polluted herself with many infidelities think to return to God? Nothing can make her ashamed, and plaintive pleas for pity only aggravate the sin of unrepenting wickedness.

This passage is perfectly compatible with the belief that Israel can never return to God. But in fact it presupposes the prophetic conviction (cf. Hos. 1-3) that God's love for Israel will never let her go, however much she sins. Yet it states

THE RESTORATION OF THE TWO KINGDOMS 3.14-18

This passage is linked on to the preceding one by the idea of returning applied here not to 'return to God' but to 'return to Jerusalem'. Scholars generally think that some at least of these verses presuppose the Babylonian exile. God will bring his people to Jerusalem and give them believing kings (lit. SHEPHERDS). They will not need the ark because Jerusalem itself will be the place of the presence of God, and all nations delivered from their stubborn blindness to God's truth shall be gathered to it. And the two kingdoms of the north and south shall be united as God's people in God's land.

14. The use of the metaphor of CHILDREN as well as that of 'wife' for Israel is not confusing because on God's part is implied the same loving care. Zion was originally the citadel of Jerusalem on the eastern hill, but the name came to stand for Jerusalem as a whole.

16. After the time that the ark was brought into the temple of Solomon (I Kings 8.6) it is not mentioned again in the historical books. We do not know if it was still in the temple in the time of Jeremiah. It has its place in the restored priestly tradition (Num. 7.8 f.; Lev. 16.2). It may well be that what was once a living testimony to the presence of God had become an obstacle to knowing him.

17. stubbornly

AV, IMAGINATION. Apart from Deut. 29.19 and Ps. 81.12, the word is only found in the Book of Jeremiah at 3.17; 7.24; 9.14; 11.8; 13.10; 16.12; 18.12; 23.17—though not all of these may come from Jeremiah himself. Skinner speaks of it as 'the deadness to religious influences of minds enveloped in an

JUDAH MORE GUILTY THAN ISRAEL 3.6-11

This probably comes from Jeremiah in the reign of Josiah. The northern kingdom, Israel, proved false in her allegiance to Jahweh her God, and because of it God drove her into exile. But though Judah saw what had happened, she did not turn to God WITH HER WHOLE HEART. The reformation which she made was only half-hearted. She did not learn from historical disaster that she must turn to God. So her guilt was greater than that of the northern kingdom. Disaster does not in fact turn the hearts of men or of nations to God, unless there is already an acute concern to know and to do his will.

The passage expresses the contrast between turning back from God to idols and turning back from idols to God.

LET ISRAEL RETURN TO GOD 3.12-13

If Israel, which has suffered so much, will even now return to God, she will be re-established in peace and prosperity. If these verses refer to the northern kingdom, they belong to that period in the reign of Josiah in which the union of the two kingdoms was still a possibility. This is one of the unfulfilled hopes of history, but none the less generous and intrinsically powerful.

12. Here we find the adjective *chased*, from the great Hebrew word *chesed* (translated in the RSV at 2.2 as 'devotion'), used of God himself (as only elsewhere at Ps. 145.17) and translated MERCIFUL. Actually God's hostility to Israel as well as his mercy proceeds from his covenant love.

13. Strangers: Here 'foreign gods'.

THE RESTORATION

This passage is likely of returning applied to Jerusalem'. Scho. these verses presuppose his people to Jerusalem SHEPHERDS). They themselves will be the people delivered from their enemies be gathered to it. south shall be united

14. The use of the 'wife' for Israel is implied the same love of Jerusalem on the for Jerusalem as a

16. After the time of Solomon (I Kings historical books. W. in the time of Jeremiah tradition (Num. 7. was once a living become an obstacle

17. stubbornly

AV, IMAGINATION the word is only found 9.14; 11.8; 13.10; may come from Jerusalem deadness to religion

atmosphere of ungodliness which cuts them off from Him who is the source of spiriutal life'.¹

The thought of a city with no visible symbol of the presence of God was taken up by the writer of the Apocalypse (21.22 f.), but the New Testament sees the answer to the meaning of the presence of God not in a restored Jerusalem but in Christ (cf. John 4.20-26).

18. While the union of north and south has a place in Jeremiah's thought, it is probable that this unqualified expression of it belongs to a later time (cf. Ezek 37.16-28).

RETURN TO GOD THROUGH REPENTANCE

3.19-4.4

FAITHLESS TO GOD'S ELECTION

3.19-20

This is a continuation of 3.5. God has treated his daughter Israel as having the dignity of a son and given to her the goodliest heritage among the nations. He expected reverence and loyalty, but instead Israel has behaved like a wife disloyal to her husband. This is the crucial issue for ancient Israel and for the Church—the calling of God and the obedience to that calling.

A TRUE PENITENCE

3.21-25

Here Jeremiah paints a moving picture of the penitence of the people, which he longed to hear them express but never

¹ *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 152.

did (cf. 14.7-9, 19-22), in terms that meant a real transformation of outlook. Perhaps this comes from a time when he believed that if Israel repented disaster would be averted. ON THE HEIGHTS (where Israel had worshipped false gods) Israel is heard WEEPING for her sin. God bids her return to him, and he will heal her faithlessness (cf. Hos. 14.4). Israel comes to God, and confesses the emptiness and corruption of her false worship and the toll it has taken of her life.

24. The shameful thing which the Jews avoided mentioning by name is the Baal—the evil substitute for worship of the true God (cf. Hos. 2.17). If Israel could be truly penitent, a complete transformation of life would take place.

THE CONDITIONS FOR BRINGING THE WORLD TO GOD

4.1-2

What is God's answer to a penitent people? If the repentance is real, the whole world will be brought to God. If Israel truly turns to God, if Israel puts away what is incompatible with worshipping him, if Israel lives in utter conviction of his presence—three conditions that are only one condition, the condition of actually turning to God—then Israel will fulfil its true destiny in bringing all the nations to God (cf. Rev. 21.22-26).

The Hebrew word for 'turning'—*shub*—may be used of 'return from exile', but has a deeper sense as meaning 'turning to and from God'. To this turning Jeremiah attached very great importance (see particularly 15.19, but compare also 3.1, 12-14, 22; 8.4-7; 15.5-9; 23.14). Man's ability to turn to God depends upon God's prior initiative (cf. 31.18, of which the meaning is 'cause me to turn, and I will turn').

THE PURIFIED HEART OR FIERY WRATH 4.3-4

But the repentance must be real, though it will be immediately painful. The ground must be ploughed up ready to receive the seed of God's word (cf. Hos. 10.12; Mark 4.7); and the heart must be 'circumcised' by the removal of all false pride that prevents a humble and pure response to God (cf. 9.26; Deut. 10.16; 30.6; Rom. 2.25-29; Col. 2.11; see also Ezek. 11.19 f.). The alternative is God's fiery wrath. In the Book of Jeremiah the words 'wrath' (*chemah*) and 'anger' (*'aph*) are used many times, usually in relation to God, and often together. (For the double use see 7.20; 10.24 f.; 21.5; 23.19 f.; 30.23 f.; 32.31-37; 33.5; 36.7; 42.18; 44.6). The recurrent emphasis on fire is sometimes explicitly associated with the idea of wrath (see 15.14; 17.4; 21.12). The alternative being in fellowship with God is to be out of fellowship with him, with all the disaster which that brings upon life. Perhaps Jeremiah thought of this in more personalist terms than it is natural for us to use. But the truth remains. And this is not spiritual blackmail. For the meaning of the fiery wrath, as of the purified heart, can be fully appreciated only by those who do in fact turn to God.

DESTRUCTION FROM THE NORTH 4.5-6.26

DESTRUCTION COMES TO GOD'S PEOPLE 4.5-31

THE ENEMY FROM THE NORTH 4.5-18

(See also 5.15-17; 6.1-8, 22-26; 8.14-17.) Jeremiah paints a picture of the disaster which he believes is coming upon Judah for its sin. To do this he uses the metaphors of a lion (the prototype of Gog in Ezek. 38-39, and of antichrist in Rev. 13 and 17), a scorching wind and the perpetual menace of war. This is a prophetic vision of the future in which the theme is more important than the details. Much has been written in an inconclusive attempt to determine who the enemy from the north was. The north was a perpetual symbol of the threat to Israel's integrity and well-being, and the use of it enables Jeremiah to employ a greater variety of language than could be applied to any one invader.

5-8. The alarm is sounded. The destroyer from the north is on his way, and this is God's judgment on Israel. A political and religious judgment is as usual combined.

9-10. The event will find the leaders of the people horrified and incredulous. They will blame God for the situation in which they find themselves. Their courage (or will or purpose, Heb. 'heart' as AV) will falter.

10. This does not represent Jeremiah's own thinking but that of the leaders of the people. For I SAID read 'they said';

Jeremiah's criticism of the prophets was that they prophesied peace in God's name at the very time when God was warning them of almost inevitable disaster.

11-12. A scorching wind will burn up Judah. When the results of human sin begin to take effect in human life they often go beyond what is remedial and become purely destructive. Yet we must be careful about reading into what is purely destructive the evidence of the intention of God.

13-18. A fierce enemy comes from afar upon Jerusalem and Judah. Repentance would have averted the disaster, which is bitter because it is Judah's own fault.

13. This verse speaks of the swiftness with which a vulture swoops upon its prey.

14. An appeal for repentance. Judah must WASH away its WICKEDNESS and not let its EVIL THOUGHTS gain an ineradicable hold.

15. The warning comes equally from Dan on the northern border of Israel, and from Mount Ephraim on the northern border of Judah.

17. Judah is surrounded as hunters surround an area where an animal is hidden so that there can be no escape.

18. The prophet sees in the coming doom of Judah that measure of political incompetence and religious disloyalty which leads to disaster, and what is most difficult to bear is that it is Judah's own fault (cf. I Cor. 15.56).

THE PROPHET'S ANGUISH AND GOD'S INDICTMENT 4.19-22

Here is our first picture of Jeremiah's intense emotional

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implication in the disaster which is coming on his people. This is expressed in Hebrew fashion in terms of the body—the disturbance of bowels and heart. Jeremiah identifies himself with the encamped army suddenly overthrown. With this picture is linked God's fundamental quarrel with human life. In refusing to respond to his redeeming grace, mankind neglects that knowledge of him which is the very principle of our existence. By 'knowing' the Hebrew means that experiential knowledge which governs action (cf. Hos. 4.1; Isa. 1.3).

THE VISION OF CHAOS

4.23-26

The picture of the prophet's emotional disturbance is followed by the poem in which he sees the whole world devastated. The earth has returned to primeval chaos (cf. Gen. 1.2) and the heavens give no light; the mountains which seem so permanent (cf. Ps. 125.2) are unstable, human life is non-existent, and the solace which Jeremiah used to find in bird life is taken away. Human culture on a fruitful earth is no more. This is no careful blue-print of the result of an historical invasion. It is a poetic sense of the devastation which man brings on himself by opposing God's purpose for him. The very absoluteness of the terms comes from the prophetic sense that man must reckon with God. This poem, this vision, is not less topical today than it was when Jeremiah first said it. But the Scriptures also contain the promise of a new heaven and a new earth instead of the chaos which man brings upon himself (see Isa. 65.17-25; Rev. 21.1-22.5).

GOD'S HOSTILITY TO JUDAH

4.27-29

These verses declare God's implacable purpose to destroy

his people, and show us a picture of the cities of Judah made desolate by fear. There is one mitigating phrase (v. 27), YET I WILL NOT MAKE A FULL END, which is found elsewhere (see 5.10, 18; 30.11). This probably comes from those who cherished the prophet's words but felt that he had gone too far. God's purpose included mercy and, after all, the exile did not mean total destruction. We have learnt of recent years to cherish not only the utterances of the prophets themselves, but also the tradition in which they are set which has much of importance to say to us.¹ But this does not destroy the difference between the tradition and the prophets themselves.² It should not be forgotten that the prophets were concerned not to convey true information about God but to confront their people with the claim of the living God. The more absolute statement, though needing qualification as regards what happened, more truly conveys Jeremiah's sense of God's hostility to Judah's present way of life and the need to change it.

THE AGONY OF JERUSALEM 4.30-31

Jerusalem's agony is like that of a prostitute being murdered by her lovers. In the hour of crisis we act true to character. Jeremiah pictures Jerusalem, in its hour of crisis, not as turning to the living God, but as courting more assiduously those false faiths which have led to its downfall (cf. Ezek. 23). We may note how often in this book childbirth is taken as the symbol of desperate agony (cf. 6.24; 13.21; 22.23; 30.6; 49.24; 50.43). The phrase DAUGHTER OF ZION or DAUGHTER OF MY PEOPLE, which is common in the prophetic literature as a personification of Judah or Jerusalem, occurs frequently in

¹ Cf. S. Mowinckel, *Prophecy and Tradition*, Oslo, 1946.

² Cf. O. Eissfeldt, 'The Prophetic Literature', *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, ed. H. H. Rowley, 1951, p. 116.

the book (cf. 4.11; 6.2, 23, 26; 8.19, 21 f.; 9.1; 14.17). The metaphor is also applied to other countries, e.g. Egypt (46.11) and Babylon (50.42).

WHY WILL DISASTER COME? 5.1-31

THE SIN OF JERUSALEM 5.1-6

Jeremiah, under pressure of the forgiving love of God, confronts the sinfulness of Jerusalem, and is horrified at what he finds. To his mind there is no goodness at all in the city. This is prophetic over-emphasis (see the comment on 26.24) of the kind which we find later in the Sermon on the Mount, and in St Paul's indictment of the world in which he lived (cf. Rom. 1.3). It presses home upon us the need to bring God's standards to bear upon human life.

For the search for one righteous man compare Gen. 18.23-33. The goodness that matters is the goodness that is acted out in life. To bring God in and yet to turn away from him makes our deceit worse. Jeremiah complains that the experience of life should have been sufficient to make the people come to God, but they have used it to make their lives self-sufficient apart from him. They have not been willing for that 'turning' to God which is all-important. But perhaps these are people who know no better—the leaders of the people will be different. No!—they are all like uncontrollable animals. The word translated LAW in vv. 4 and 5 (AV and RV JUDGEMENT, Heb. *mishpat*) means the will of God as it had been made clear in past experience and the character of God there disclosed.

To this recording of Jeremiah's experience is added the judgment that disaster must follow this turning away from God—couched in animal metaphors (cf. 4.7). Dante's use of the leopard, the lion and the she-wolf to bar the way to hell before he meets Virgil in the first canto of the *Inferno* has often been noted.

HOW CAN GOD PARDON HIS PEOPLE? 5.7-11

As often in the Old Testament, so here Jeremiah speaks of idolatry in terms of sexual licence. This reflects the sensual character of the religion of Baal and the orgiastic nature of the cultic rites. God's people are like unrestrained stallions; how can he pardon them?

9. visit (AV)

The Hebrew word used here may express good or evil results; it may mean blessing (cf. Luke 1.68) but because of the sin of man it often means 'visit to punish'. Hence RSV translates simply as PUNISH. Judah is God's vineyard, but her branches are not his. They bear an alien fruit (cf. Matt. 7.16-20; John 15.6). As before (4.27) and in v. 18 I WILL NOT MAKE A FULL END OF YOU. Whatever truth these words have, they are not appropriate to the prophet's denunciation.

GOD'S WORD IS NOT EMPTY WIND BUT DEVOURING FIRE 5.12-14

The people have said that God will do nothing (cf. Ps. 14.1; Zeph. 1.12), and that the spirit that is in the prophets (i.e. prophets like Jeremiah, or Zephaniah, or Uriah—see 26.20-24) who prophesy God's punishment of Judah is only wind. (The

Hebrew word *ruach* means both 'spirit' and 'wind' cf. John 3.5-8.) We are faced with this same situation today. The experience of God is the most intimate, the most central, and the most persistent experience of life; yet when men refuse to respond to God, it can be denied and in large measure ignored.

Jeremiah's answer is that, so far from the prophetic word being empty and powerless, God is making it a devouring FIRE (cf. 4.4; 15.14; 17.4; 21.14; 23.29; Deut. 4.24; Heb. 12.29). To those who turn away from God, God's presence must become real, not through blessing but through disaster.

14. God of hosts

This phrase is used especially by Isaiah, but also by Amos, Haggai, Zephaniah and Malachi. It expresses the power of God over all the powers that exist in his universe (cf. Col. 1.16-19). He not only leads the armies of Israel (Ex. 7.4; 12.41) but also the heavenly hosts (Ps. 103.21) and the stars (Isa. 40.26).

GOD IS BRINGING UPON JUDAH A DEVOURING NATION 5.15-17

Once again we have a picture of the enemy from the north. The description of the invader does not fit any particular nation.

16. The empty quivers of the enemy are like so many empty tombs in which those killed by the arrows can be buried. This is part of the process of devouring.

17. they shall eat up your sons and daughters
Compare with this Deut. 28.49-53.

JUDAH DESERVED THE EXILE 5.18-19

This is a later comment, mitigating the harshness of the previous verses, and going on to say that Judah's serving a foreign power in exile is fitting retribution for its serving foreign gods at home (cf. 9.12-16; 16.10-13; 22.8 f.; Deut. 29.24-26; I Kings 9.8 f.). It is a tribute to the work which Jeremiah did for his people, that when the exile came they were not shattered by it, but, accepting it as God's punishment, turned to God to seek in a new way their life from him.

GOD'S STUPID AND REBELLIOUS PEOPLE 5.20-25

God's people have turned away from their true worship and obedience; they do not acknowledge the majesty of God their Creator. (We should note in this passage God's implicit will to redeem his people. There is an essential link between the creative and redeeming functions of God. The sense of God's hurt would not be there unless God willed to redeem.) The two signs given here of the power of God in creation are his control of the sea, and his giving and withholding of rain. The Jewish people feared the sea (cf. Rev. 21.1) and were glad to think that it was under God's control (Job 38.8-11). Behind this teaching lies a mythical cosmology about the conquest of chaos which has been purged to serve the faith of Israel (cf. also Ps. 104.5-9). In addition, the dependence of Palestine upon the rainfall was thought to bring the land into an intimate relation with God, and his giving or withholding of rain was understood to express his approval or disapproval (cf. Deut. 11.10-17). In contrast with the forces of nature which are under God's control, the prophet sees the people as stupid, as not using their powers of understanding to discern God (cf. 4.22; Isa. 6.10; Ezek. 12.2; Mark 4.9), and

as rebellious in defying God where the sea cannot. We, who live in the twentieth century, have a more complicated understanding of the relation between God and nature. But we must still be on our guard against being condemned by this passage if we fail to discern and reverence God the Creator and fail to obey his will and purpose for man.

BOUNDLESS WICKEDNESS

5.26-29

Jeremiah sees WICKED MEN prospering as THEY CATCH MEN, as a fowler traps birds, not for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mark 1.17), but for their own gain. Their prosperity in wickedness (cf. Deut. 32.15; Job 15.27; Ps. 73.7) shuts them away from God (cf. Luke 12.13-21). And so they have no sensitiveness to what is right, they do not help those who need protection. By justice the Old Testament does not mean holding the scales even, but active intervention on the side of those too weak to defend themselves (cf. Deut. 24.17-22). This boundless wickedness demands retribution. It deserves God's punishment.

CORRUPT RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

5.30-31

The Bible is never hesitant in proclaiming the fact that those who speak in the name of God may be unworthy of trust (cf. Isa. 28.7-10; Micah 2.11; 3.5-7; Matt. 23). Prophets and priests had a common task. In this the status of the prophets 'was at least as high, if not actually higher than that of the priests; for the latter not only co-operated with them, but indeed looked to them for guidance in their administration'.¹

¹ A. R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel*, 1944, p. 54.

This was because the prophetic knowledge of God was essentially personal. If this was false, the whole religious leadership was appallingly wrong. And this corrupt leadership was not only acquiesced in but welcomed and applauded by the people at large. But the problem that pressed in on Jeremiah insistently was WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN THE END COMES? We may say in terms of Isa. 2.11, 'The Lord alone will be exalted in that day,' but Jeremiah was concerned that, when the disaster came, his people should survive as a believing people of God. The purpose of his life's work was to ensure this.

JUDAH'S GUILT IS THE CAUSE OF DESTRUCTION

6.1-26

DISASTER COMES FROM THE NORTH UPON JERUSALEM

6.1-8

With ch. 6 we return to the vivid pictures of ch. 4. The attack is coming nearer than in 4.5-18. The inhabitants of Benjamin are bidden to flee from Jerusalem to the southern hill country. (Tekoa, the home of the prophet Amos, is twelve miles south. The position of Beth-haccherem (Neh. 3.14) is uncertain.) The invaders will strip Jerusalem bare. When they miss the chance of unexpected attack in the midday rest (cf. 15.8; 20.16; Zeph. 2.4) they will attack at night. This is God's punishment of Jerusalem, because as every city had its underground reservoir of fresh water on which its life depended, so Jerusalem has at her heart an ever-renewed spring of wickedness. SHE KEEPS FRESH HER WICKEDNESS (RSV). If we rejoice in our Lord's picture of 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (John 4.14) we shall be horrified at this picture

of the mystery of iniquity renewing itself perpetually. Yet the prophet makes his judgment as a warning against its actually being true in fact.

NO TRACE OF RESPONSE TO GOD 6.9-10

Jeremiah, who in ch. 5 was bidden to search Jerusalem for any trace of goodness, is here bidden to go back again and glean and see if there are any bunches of grapes on God's vine which he has missed. But his hearers have UNCIRCUMCISED EARS, ears closed to the word of God which they despise (cf. Acts 7.51). Unless the word of God is our delight it is bound to be a 'nagging weariness'.¹ Here is the first hint of the burden which the unresponsiveness of the people laid upon Jeremiah's own spirit (cf. 20.7-18).

THE WRATH OF GOD UPON DISOBEDIENT OPTIMISM

6.11-15

(Verses 12-15 are repeated in 8.10-12.)

Jeremiah is on both sides of the conflict—on the side of the people for whom he cares, and on the side of God who is hostile to their persistent sinfulness. So Jeremiah feels the wrath of God welling up within him to bursting point. God bids him pour it out on the population as a whole as political disaster.

This mention of the wrath of God is taken further in the image of the cup of the wine of wrath in 25.15. However much we need to set the teaching of the Old Testament within the fuller and deeper revelation given in Christ, it remains true

¹ A. C. Welch in the *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, 1929, p. 684.

to both Old Testament and New that God's hostility to sin is part of his redeeming love.¹

Three things Jeremiah complains of. One is a spirit of greediness (AV COVETOUSNESS) which in Old Testament and New is a contradiction of God's way of life (cf. Isa. 57.17; Ezek. 33.31; Ps. 119.36; Eph. 4.19; Col. 3.5). The second is a false optimism which is a fault Jeremiah persistently finds in the religious leaders. The peace which they proclaim—the life and health of God's people—is in fact retarded because it is announced before the conditions for its coming have been fulfilled. So a superficial cure, which makes the wound fester deeply below the surface, gives less cause for real joy and optimism than a painful probing which leads to complete recovery. What must be done with the sin of man is to acknowledge and remove it so that fellowship with God becomes deep and far-reaching. The third thing that is wrong is lack of shame in the presence of wrongdoing. A sensitiveness to the shame of wrongdoing is an essential part of true human living. To be 'hardened' in ourselves against being ashamed is a distortion, not a strength, of human life.

JUDAH SAYS TO GOD, 'WE WILL NOT . . .'

6.16-19

Judah has disobeyed God in two ways: in not being faithful to the covenant relationship, and in not heeding the warnings of God's prophets, so God calls on the nations and on the natural world to realize that he is bringing upon his people the result of their own apostasy.

The metaphor of life as a journey is very frequent in the

¹ The attempt to draw a distinction between a 'personal' wrath in the Old Testament, and an 'impersonal' wrath in the New (e.g. by A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, 1957) must be counted unsuccessful. For a general discussion see Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 1958, pp. 75-79.

Bible and not least in Jeremiah (cf. in the New Testament John 14.6; Acts 9.2). Judah is bidden to go back to the cross-roads to see where she went wrong, and find the right path (cf. 13.16; 18.15; 23.12). This is not a plea for intransigent and unintelligent conservatism, for acquiescence in self-imposed habits which obscure God's call. God is the beginning and we must go back to our corporate or individual covenant with him to renew our true fellowship and to recover our sense of direction (cf. William Cowper's hymn: 'O for a closer walk with God!').

16. rest for your souls

John Skinner says, 'The rest of soul here spoken of is not to be identified with the inward spiritual satisfaction which Jesus promises to the weary and heavy laden; and yet there is more than verbal agreement between these two great sayings. From the lips of the prophet it means the deep peace of mind in the face of threatening national dangers in accordance with the eternal laws of the divine government of the universe; in the mouth of Jesus it is the higher blessedness of the individual who in meekness and humility accepts the yoke of Christ and knows that nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord.'¹

18. The Hebrew text is corrupt and the English versions are not intelligible. The best alternative versions seem to be either: 'Therefore hear, O nations, and know well what I will inflict upon them,' or: 'Therefore hear, O heavens, and bear witness against them.'

19. the fruit of their devices

AV and RV read 'thoughts'; but it is better to read with LXX 'the fruit of their apostasy'. Judah has said, 'WE WILL NOT . . .' both to God's WORDS (through the prophets), and to his LAW (through the covenant).

¹ *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 117.

SACRIFICES NO SUBSTITUTE FOR
OBEDIENCE
6.20-21

Jeremiah's judgment on sacrifice is given a sharper edge in 7.21-23. Here it is quite clear that it is no alternative to the way of obedience which Judah has rejected. Frankincense came from Sheba in the south-west of Arabia, and sweet cane or calamus (cf. Isa. 43.24; Ex. 30.23) used in the making of incense from India. Without the spirit of obedience no sacrifices can bring Judah nearer to the fellowship with God. In contrast with the way of REST in God's covenant, on the way of disobedience Judah will STUMBLE to ruin. In the New Testament we are taught that Christ is a stumbling-block (Rom. 9.33, quoting Isa. 8.14 and 28.16; I Cor. 1.23) but yet a means of redemption; and also that we are not to put stumbling-blocks in on another's way (Rom. 14.13). In what sense ought we to think of God laying stumbling-blocks? Only in the sense of allowing the inevitable consequence of men's actions to work themselves out. The stumbling-blocks are created by man's refusal to obey God's purpose. Jeremiah suggests once again the indiscriminateness of political disaster when it comes (cf. 6.11; 5.17).

THE ENEMY FROM THE NORTH IS COMING
6.22-26

(Verses 22-24 are repeated against Babylon in 50.41-43.)

With these verses we are back again in Jeremiah's pictures of the enemy from the north and of the anguish that will come upon Judah then. The enemy, in contrast with Judah, had no tradition of mercy; but the pitilessness of the enemy should

make people reflect on the greater awfulness of being disobedient to the living God.

25. Terror is on every side

Jeremiah saw this in imagination long before it happened. The phrase is a favourite one of his (cf. 20.3, 10; 46.5; 49.29; cf. also Ps. 31.13; Job 18.11). The anguish he interprets in images taken from family life—once again in the image of the pain of childbirth (cf. 4.31), and in that of the loss of an only son leaving no one to carry on the family name (cf. Amos 8.10; Zech. 12.10).

JEREMIAH IS GOD'S MEANS OF TESTING
AND REJECTING JUDAH
6.27-30

God has made Jeremiah AN ASSAYER OF HIS PEOPLE (read with RSV AN ASSAYER AND TESTER instead of AV and RV 'a tower and a fortress'). But they are all thoroughly corrupt. No amount of smelting will result in any pure silver separate from the dross. The people are only silver refuse. God has rejected them.

The text of these verses is uncertain, but their general meaning is clear. The phrase THE LEAD IS CONSUMED BY THE FIRE cannot be right because this does not happen. The function of the lead is to draw the alloys away from the silver. Here it is unable to do this. Perhaps we should read: 'from the fire the lead comes out whole.'

The conviction expressed here must have come after Jeremiah had had some experience of prophesying, and had come to the conclusion that the only result of his labours was to expose more clearly the worthlessness of his people.

This negative experience of the prophet must both be taken seriously and also seen in its true perspective. This negative sense of the effect of prophetic ministry is not confined to

Jeremiah (cf. Isa. 6.9-12, where the image is quite different but the result is the same). But we have to ask ourselves whether this negative judgment of God through the prophet represents God's permanent, static judgment upon Judah, or whether it is something to provoke Judah to confront the living God anew, something to make what is true in the prophetic vision no longer true in the future. Is Jeremiah a prophet of denunciation, or is he not rather a prophet of grace through denunciation? Are not his most absolute final words of rejection goads to stir reluctant Judah to tread again the path of obedience to God and life in him? Perhaps we cannot fully enter into the experience of Jeremiah unless we read these verses in the light of St Paul's agony over his people in Rom. 9-11, and take from St Paul the hidden word of hope which here does not come to explicit expression.

DISOBEDIENT JUDAH IS IN
GOD'S HAND: JEREMIAH
LEARNS TO ACCEPT GOD'S
PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT
(Prophecies mainly from the time of Jehoiakim)

7.1-20.18

JERUSALEM'S WRONG ATTITUDE
TO GOD

7.1-10.25

THE TEMPLE SERMON

7.1-15

With ch. 7 we come to Jeremiah's first public act—an act requiring great courage because it set him in opposition to people, prophets, priests, kings. It is the source of all his later tribulation and all his later ministry. What is remarkable about Jeremiah is his combination of deep sensitiveness and resolute inflexibility. Once he was convinced of God's will nothing could turn him from it. A shorter account of this temple sermon and an account of the effect it produced is given in ch. 26. Its permanent truth, which belongs to the Christian faith, is that God is greater than all the means of grace which bind us to him, because these may become hindrances to that very trust in God which they are meant to serve.

This is a prose address and is coloured by the Deuteronomistic editorial tradition, but we can have every confidence that the sermon goes back to Jeremiah himself, even if we cannot ascribe the precise wording to him. The distinction which has been drawn between the conditional appeal for

repentance in vv. 3-7 and the absolute rejection of vv. 8-15 is unconvincing. The most absolute words of condemnation on God's part contain a hidden promise of blessing, and the most generous conditional promise contains no assurance that God's people will in fact fulfil it.

The address, as we learn from 26.1, was given early in the reign of Jehoiakim (608-597), probably in 608. The people had gathered in the temple to be reinforced in their belief that God would protect them in their difficult situation. Josiah had been killed, Jehoahaz had been deposed and exiled; Jehoiakim was a subject-ally of Egypt, and the outcome of the conflict between Egypt and Babylon was undecided.

Jeremiah stood in the temple court, apparently at the gate connecting the inner with the outer court, to speak to the worshippers.

3-7. The people reiterate their confidence in the temple, treating it in fact as something that has authority in itself apart from the mind and will of God. The teaching of Isaiah (8.18; 28.16) about the presence of God in Jerusalem, which seemed to be confirmed by the deliverance from Assyria in 701 BC (II Kings 19.35), gave the people a confidence that the temple could not be destroyed, and this was reinforced by Josiah's reform in 621 BC, which made the temple central to the worship of both northern and southern kingdoms. Jeremiah insists that God's blessing of his people is real only if the worship of the true God is accompanied by the repudiation of idolatry and violence, by the practice of fair dealing, and by generous consideration for the weak. (The alien, the fatherless and the widow, are often linked in Deuteronomy as examples of those who because they were not in a position actively to secure their own rights needed the protection and help of those who believe in God; cf. Deut. 14.29; 16.11, 14, 26.12; cf. also Ex. 22.21 f.)

8-15. Jeremiah complains that the people are treating God's

covenant with his people as a licence for immoral living which makes a mockery of their worship. Will they combine repudiation of the ten commandments (five are mentioned) with rejoicing in God's delivering power? The temple, which is God's house, is in fact being treated as a robber's cave. In Mark 11.17 Jesus combines the negative reference to the temple having been made a den of robbers with the positive emphasis on the temple as the house of prayer (Isa. 56.7) to justify his own cleansing of the temple.

Let Jeremiah's hearers think of the ruins of the temple at Shiloh, which they could still see. That temple had been the honoured centre of worship in northern Israel (Josh. 18.1; I Sam. 1.3; Ps. 78.60), but it was destroyed. (As modern excavations have shown, this happened about 1050 BC, apparently at the hands of the Philistines when they captured the ark of the covenant, I Sam. 4.10-22.) Because of Judah's disobedience, God will do the same thing to the temple of the southern kingdom.

13. persistently

The RSV translates thus where the other English versions give *RISE UP EARLY*, thus eliminating a vivid Hebrew word-picture of God as active from early morning about the business he really cares for, and continuing unweariedly throughout the day. This is a favourite expression with Jeremiah, see 7.25; 11.7; 25.3 f.; 26.5; 29.19; 32.33; 35.14 f.; 44.4.

14. They trust in the temple and not in God himself—this is the heart of Jeremiah's complaint.

15. The offspring of Ephraim

This means the northern kingdom exiled in 722 BC (see II Kings 17.23). The ancient conception that Jahweh, the God of Israel, is localized in his people's territory (cf. II Kings 5.17) governs this prophecy of exile. Jeremiah was to learn a larger conception, see 24.1-10 and 29.1-14; contrast 52.3.

The theme of Jeremiah's temple sermon is taken up again in the New Testament in the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day. He also has been forced into a position of hostility to the temple. He offers a new centre for the worship of God in himself, and is oppressed by a sense of the impending destruction which the embittered fanaticism of the Jews will bring upon themselves (cf. Matt. 23.37-39; Luke 13.34 f.; Mark 13.1-4; 14.53-72; 15.22-32; John 2.12-22; 4.16-26; Acts 6.9-15). The need to break a false religious security in order to come to a true trust in God is thus of decisive importance in both Old Testament and New. It witnesses to a perpetual tendency in human life to use God for our purposes instead of allowing ourselves to be used for his purposes.

JEREMIAH FORBIDDEN TO PRAY FOR HIS
PEOPLE
7.16

The temple address is not continued here, and we do not know from what period in Jeremiah's life this verse comes. Jeremiah is forbidden to pray for the people, as again in 11.14 and 14.11 f. In 15.1 it is affirmed that even the intercession of Moses and Samuel would be unavailing. The experience of prayer which brings with it to the praying man the conviction that his prayer has been heard involves, on occasion, the conviction that his prayer has not been heard. But Jeremiah's experience goes far deeper—this is the experience of frustration in the very act of prayer. Judah's disobedience is so horrible that Jeremiah feels a revulsion within himself at interceding for her. Amos had had the same experience (see Amos 7.1-9). Judah was, as we should say, past praying for—so settled in sinful habits that no prayer will alter her (cf. our Lord's saying about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in Mark 3.29.) That this is so is a great sorrow for God and for

Jeremiah: and the paradoxical thing is that this consciousness of being forbidden to pray is itself wondrous intercession. (Other examples of an intercessor were Abraham, Gen. 18.23-33, and David, II Sam. 24.17. St Paul's experience of the non-removal of his thorn in the flesh, II Cor. 12.7-10, was not an experience of the ceasing of intercession, but of an answer to prayer that was contrary to his hopes.)

THE WORSHIP OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN
7.17-20
(cf. 44.15-30)

The reason why intercession is unavailing is because the people are worshipping the Queen of Heaven. This worship is morally undemanding and leaves the worshippers to their own self-indulgence and self-deceit. The Queen of Heaven was Ishtar, a goddess worshipped in Assyria and Babylonia. She was the planet Venus, the goddess of love and fertility, and the cakes used in her worship were perhaps in the form of a star. Her worship was probably introduced by Manasseh (II Kings 21.1-9). The only references to this worship in the reign of Jehoiakim are here and at 8.1-3, but according to 44.15-30 it was reaffirmed by the Jews who fled to Egypt after the fall of Jerusalem. In opposition to Jeremiah, who attributes the disasters that have befallen them to their disobedience of God, the women insist that it is due to their failure to continue to worship the Queen of Heaven. After the death of Josiah in 608 BC, it may well be that many people lost confidence in the reformed faith and began to resume practices from the reign of Manasseh. Ezekiel (8.1-6) may refer to this kind of worship.

19-20. provoke me to anger

This expression, put into the mouth of God, is a favourite one in the Book of Jeremiah (see 8.19; 11.17; 25.6 f.; 32.29 f.; 32; 44. 3, 8). Here the true insight is gained, that God in his

essential being is not unsettled by man's sin (even though God has exposed himself to being hurt by man's sin), but man's sin recoils in disaster upon his own head. It is himself that man damages by sinning.

JEREMIAH'S JUDGMENT ON SACRIFICE 7.21-23

The great pre-exilic prophets all took a strongly critical attitude to the sacrificial worship of their time (see Amos 5.21-25; 4.4 f.; 5.4-6; Hos. 6.6; 5.6; 4.19; Isa. 1.11-15; Micah 6.6-8). Indeed, Amos 5.21-25 and Jer. 7.21-23 were instrumental in leading to the conviction, now almost universally accepted, that the elaborate sacrificial system given in the Pentateuch taken as a whole cannot be a historical tradition which the prophets presuppose.

But scholars are not wholly agreed, and are not likely to resolve their disagreement, as to whether the present passage is a root and branch condemnation of sacrifice or whether it is a condemnation of it if divorced from the primary requirement of obedience to the will of God.

Jeremiah must have known of the sacrificial tradition embodied in the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 21-23) and in Deuteronomy. It is quite clear that for him the main thing in the Mosaic covenant is obedience to God and not sacrifice. This is confirmed by modern study which reveals that the sacrificial system is common to the Semitic peoples, and of itself embodies little that is distinctive of Israelite tradition.

But it seems to the present commentator, who takes the view that the absolutes of Hebrew prophecy are not so much legal concepts as incentives to action, very doubtful whether Jeremiah meant to repudiate sacrifice altogether. The prophets see the evil in the sacrificial worship of their day, and they affirm that doing the will of God is the primary thing, but they do not deny that sacrifice could be used as a vehicle of

God's grace and man's response. Their grudging attitude paves the way for the supersession of animal sacrifice by the redemptive work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

21. The worshippers are advised to eat even the burnt offerings (which were wholly offered to God) as well as other offerings (which they were accustomed to eat) because they have lost any sacred significance, and they might just as well eat the meat.

THE TRADITION OF DISOBEDIENCE 7.24-28

There are two traditions in the history of Israel. One, already given at 2.1-3, is that there was a honeymoon period of Israel's love to God in the wilderness. The tradition given here, that Israel was rebellious from the very beginning, was naturally emphasized by those who returned from exile. It is this tradition which is expressed in Stephen's speech in Acts 7. It is possible that Jeremiah made use of both traditions to serve his purpose. The prophet must expect that a people that is disobedient to God will be unresponsive to his servant (cf. John 15.18-20). Judah is disobedient and has not learnt from the discipline: she is altogether unfaithful. (Truth here means truth by which men live; cf. 5.1-5.) This is the drastic prophetic condemnation which may lead to repentance and renewal.

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD ON HUMAN SACRIFICES IN THE VALLEY OF BEN-HINNOM 7.29-34

Jeremiah is so absolute in the condemnation of his people that as we read him we are conscious that this is not the

total human truth, and we seek to mitigate his verdict, which is a goad to repentance and transformation. But we have to remember that Jeremiah is condemning not just a general spirit of disobedience to God, but some horrible and degrading practices. Of these human sacrifice was the worst.

29. There is real cause for LAMENTATION because God has rejected his people. (Cutting the hair was a sign of mourning, cf. Micah 1.16.) THE BARE HEIGHTS, where idolatrous worship, including artificially stimulated mourning, had been practised, can now mourn in earnest.

30-31. Two things God specifically complains of: idolatrous worship in the temple, and the building of the high place of Topheth for human sacrifice. The ABOMINATIONS are the idols in the temple introduced by Manasseh (II Kings 21.1-9), destroyed by Josiah (II Kings 23.4-14) and reintroduced after Josiah's death. Acceptable worship of God can only be that which recognizes his uniqueness and does not compromise his essential character. Topheth probably originally meant 'fire-place' (cf. Isa. 30.33), but when the victory over human sacrifice had been won, it was given the vowels of the word *bosheth* meaning shame, which believing Jews applied to worship of Baal. The Valley of Hinnom (or of the son of Hinnom) lay south and south-west of Jerusalem. Whether or not in the ancestry of Judah there was any trace of human sacrifice is a matter on which scholars are not entirely unanimous (cf. Gen. 22.1-19; Ex. 22.29; 34.20; Judg. 11.30-40; Micah 6.6-8). The practice of sacrificing the first-born son is recorded of Ahaz and Manasseh (II Kings 16.3; 21.6). Ezekiel in a horrifying passage (20.25 f.) makes this practice, by its very corruption, subserve the glory of God. However this may be, it is quite clear that human sacrifice meant a repudiation of the covenant and regression into idolatrous barbarism.

32-33. Because of this enormity, destruction will come upon

Judah, and in the Valley of Hinnom, where they slaughtered their own children, they themselves will be slaughtered. The 'holy place' will be defiled by being used as a burial ground, and the corpses themselves will be defiled because they will be left unburied. The Hebrews thought that to leave the dead unburied was a fearful curse, for the dead would have no rest (cf. 16.4; 19.7; 34.20).

The substance of 7.29-33 is repeated at 19.1-15, where, with the sign of the broken flask, Jeremiah insists that child sacrifice is the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem, and at 32.34 f., which is an expansion of Jeremiah's prayer when he bought a field at Anathoth.

The Valley of Hinnom gave its name as Gehenna to the concept of a place for the future punishment of the wicked (cf. Isa. 66.24; Mark 9.44). We cannot escape our history, but it may be that in considering the problem of the opposition between God's hostility to sin and man's hardening in disobedience, the overtones of this horrible episode in Jewish history have played too large a part.

If we ask what in fact was the relation of the practice of human sacrifice to the exile of 587 BC, it is clear that the answer is not simple. But the difference between a morally transforming and a normally degrading worship plays its part in that political instability which brought disaster on Judah.

As we in the twentieth century read such a passage as this we ought to do so with an acute sense of shame for the many instances of the degradation of the human life which have taken or are taking place. We may not be under condemnation for this particular monstrosity, but others sufficiently similar are still with us. Complexity of civilization is no guarantee of that essential humanity which will 'do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with (our) God' (Micah 6.8 RSV—the word translated 'kindness' is the great Hebrew word *chesed* [see 2.2; 3.12], and means here faithful dealing as between man and man).

34. We shall hardly ever find a more compassionate denouncer than Jeremiah. With his lurid pictures of disaster and obscenity there goes a deep sadness that such things should happen to his beloved country for whom he covets an unmolested and happy home life. It is a great pity that his enjoyment of natural happiness was so restricted by the conflict between his vocation and the times in which he lived. The verse comes upon us again as a kind of refrain in 16.9; 25.10; 33.11.

APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT FOR
WORSHIPPING THE HOST OF HEAVEN
8.1-3

Because of the similarity of result this section which deals with the worshipping of heavenly bodies (cf. 19.13 and Deut. 4.19; 17.2-7; II Kings 17.16 f.; 23.4 f.; Ezek. 8.16) is linked with the previous one. It is an ironic comment on the emptiness of this idolatrous worship that to be exposed in death to the heavenly bodies, to whom such assiduous worship was paid, was felt as the deepest shame. This indignity will fall on all from the least to the greatest, for all have shared in disobedience (cf. 5.1-5). In exile death will be preferable to life (cf. Deut. 28.64-67).

JUDAH DOES NOT KNOW HER WAY AS
THE BIRDS KNOW THEIRS
8.4-7

Judah's persistent ignorance of and disobedience to God is unnatural. When a man falls he gets up again; when he loses the track he is following he comes back to find it again (cf. 4.1-2). (The same verbal root *shub* is used in three forms in v. 5—TURNED AWAY (AV 'slidden back'), BACKSLIDING, and

RETURN). This failure of his people to turn to God is Jeremiah's great grief. And there is no sense of shame, only a plunging headlong to disaster in self-chosen ways, like a horse out of control. Birds obeying the time and direction of their return after their winter migration are obeying the will of God for them. It is natural for man, at a higher level, to do the same with equal certainty and fidelity. Alas, this is not what happens (cf. 2.10 f.; 5.22 f.; 18.11-17; Isa. 1.3).

7. ordinance

With this (AV 'judgment', Heb. *mishpat*) cf. 5.4 f. (where it is translated 'law').

THE TRADITION OF THE SCRIBES IS
UNTRUE TO GOD'S WORD
8.8-12

10-12. These verses, dealing with the wrath of God upon disobedient optimism, are repeated from 6.13-15 where they belong. If we knew the facts to which vv. 8 f. refer, we could supply the commentary, but we cannot by commentary recreate the facts. The phrase THE FALSE PEN OF THE SCRIBES HAS MADE IT INTO A LIE opens a wide field for conjecture. What the relation of this is to the Josianic reform, or whether it refers to the contrast between written and spoken prophecy, we do not know. Certainly Jeremiah would disagree with those who trusted in a formal guaranteed obedience to the will of God in contrast with a total obedience discovered under pressure of the actual situation. Only those who are in fact actually obedient to God can say WE ARE WISE, AND THE LAW OF THE LORD IS WITH US.

JUDAH IS AN UNFRUITFUL VINE
8.13

When I would gather them . . . there are no grapes (RSV)

God's disappointment with his vineyard is a constant theme of Scripture (cf. 5.10-11; 6.9; Isa. 5.15; Luke 13.6-9; Mark 11.13). But not only are there no grapes, **EVEN THE LEAVES ARE WITHERED** (RSV). The failure to bear fruit is destroying the capacity to do it (cf. Mark 4.25).

THE PEOPLE'S DESPAIR AT THE ENEMY'S
ATTACK
8.14-17

We should be greatly helped in interpreting Jeremiah's poems if we had contemporary chronological notes indicating at what period of his life they were written and what was the political and military situation of the time. We have to make up our own minds whether this is a reflection of the actual despair of the people or whether it is Jeremiah's picture of the despair they will experience.

14. This contains a quotation from 4.5. God is against the people for their sin. He has given them **POISONED WATER** (AV, **WATER OF GALL**) to drink (cf. 9.15; Deut. 29.18).

16. The whole land quakes before the enemy from the north (Dan is the extreme north of Palestine).

17. If this is in place here, it is God's word that they do well to despair because they cannot charm the disaster away (cf. 4.30). (On the charming of snakes cf. Eccles. 10.11; Ps. 58.4 f.)

JEREMIAH'S GRIEF OVER THE PLIGHT
OF HIS PEOPLE
8.18-9.1

Jeremiah's ministry to his people, as a prophet of God, is not only to be found in his denunciation of their sin, but also in his identification of himself with them (whatever be their sin) and his deep distress at the situation that confronts them. We do not know the precise reference of this poem. It is not linked to the previous one, and there is no need to interpret it as referring to a famine because of the harvest imagery in v. 20. It is natural for us as we read to think of it as expressing something permanent in Jeremiah's attitude to his country in distress. The last question in v. 19 referring to the people's sinfulness should be treated as an intrusion by a Deuteronomistic editor into a poem that is a simple and natural expression of grief.

19. from the length and breadth of the land

RSV is right here; the reference to **A FAR COUNTRY** in AV and RV is wrong. Whatever Judah has done, God is her King and he cares for her. It is remarkable that Jeremiah in expressing his passionate love of his country never suggests that God cares less.

20. The natural hopes of well-being have failed, disaster seems inevitable. **HARVEST** and **SUMMER** represent the two successive phases of the harvest-season in Palestine—the grain harvest from April to June and the fruit harvest coming later. Peake says on this verse, 'If the harvest failed the people might still look forward to the fruit, but if the fruit also failed famine stared them in the face.' This image is the measure of the disaster that now faces the country.

22. Since God is the great healer of his people, how is it that

God's people are not healed? BALM IN GILEAD was resin from the styrax tree, for which Gilead (across the Jordan from Anathoth) was famous. It was used for purposes of healing and was exported (cf. 46.11; 51.8; Ezek. 27.17; Gen. 37.25). There is no answer to this question even in the sinfulness of man, because God's purpose to heal comes before and is more enduring than man's sin (cf. Hos. 11.8; Gen. 9.8-17).

9.1 is a cry of sheer pain by Jeremiah at the hurt his people have suffered (cf. II Sam. 18.33; Matt. 23.37; Luke 13.34).

UNIVERSAL DECEIT 9.2-9

(For the sense read v. 8 after v. 4; note that v. 9 has already appeared at 5.9, 29. It may be thought intrusive or as carrying forward the thought of v. 7.)

In this poem we have the opposite emotional attitude to the preceding one, and both are necessary to Jeremiah's total outlook. In part he is completely identified with his people; in part he is estranged from them in horror and disgust. Here is the same devastating judgment of his people's wrongdoing as in 5.1-5 (cf. Hos. 4.1-3) with further unhappy experience of its truth.

2. With this verse cf. Ps. 55.6 f.: 'O that I had wings like a dove . . . I would lodge in the wilderness.' A traveller's hut in the desert with all its discomfort would be preferable to constant association with breakers of the covenant (ADULTERERS).

What Jeremiah complains of (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8) are sins of the tongue (cf. Ps. 12 and James 3.1-12)—lies, slander, double-dealing and deceit. For Jeremiah's own experience of the poisoning of intimate relationships see 11.19; 12.6; 20.10. What Jeremiah insists on is that this way of living destroys

the most important thing in life—the knowledge of God, an active responsive relation of trust and obedience to God. Deceitfulness of life is an inevitable barrier to knowing God, and the refusal to know God breeds the kind of life that leads more and more away from him.

So God must refine and test his people, and punishment lies ahead. Whether God or his prophet (see 6.27-30) is thought of as the assayer of the people, the same spiritual reality is implied. Here is another call to repentance, which, Jeremiah says (v. 5), they are too exhausted by wrongdoing to have time for.

LAMENT OVER DESOLATE JUDAH 9.10-11

Here is another brief poem on the coming disaster. Judah will be LAID WASTE. The domestic side of nature—the birds and the beasts—will be taken away, and only the unpleasant scavengers will be left. (In v. 11 read with RSV: A LAIR OF JACKALS.)

THE REASON FOR JUDAH'S PUNISHMENT 9.12-16

This is a prose comment which probably comes from disciples of Jeremiah, gathering up what they took to be his message, but in the process hardening and distorting it. The suggestion of mystery in v. 12 may date back to Jeremiah himself. There is something horrible in God's people being brought to disaster. WHY IS THE LAND RUINED? Because Judah disobeyed God. This is the conviction which the men of the exile brought back with them, and it helped them both to bear the disaster with faith in God and to look forward to a new period of obedient fellowship with him. But it is too simple

a formula, and too drastic a summary of Jeremiah's teaching. to be really helpful, unless illuminated by continuous reflection on what it means for a state and a church to be obedient to God, and how out of revelation and out of life we understand God's dealing with them.

15. With this verse compare 8.15.

DEATH THE REAPER 9.17-22

With v. 17 we are brought back to the thought of vv. 10-11. This poem on Death the Reaper was said by Skinner to be 'perhaps the most brilliant example of the prophetic elegy which the Old Testament contains'.¹ The mourning women were professional women who excited mourning in others (cf. Mark 5.38) and recited poetic dirges for the dead (cf. II Chron. 35.25). The women, alas! have something real to mourn for—and not only for the destruction of houses, but even more for the destruction of human life. Strong houses have not been able to keep out the intruder, death, and when he has reaped no one is there to gather the corpses after him. The prophet's anguish at the coming disaster is fully apparent.

MAN'S TRUE GLORY 9.23-24

Though there seems no special reason why this passage should have been placed here, there also seems to be no reason to deny it to Jeremiah. It agrees with the central emphasis of his thought (cf. 2.8; 4.22; 9.2-5; 22.16; 31.3 f.) and it focuses the prophetic conviction, fulfilled in the Sermon on

¹ *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 124.

the Mount (cf. Matt. 6.19-33), that God's exercise of kindness, justice and righteousness is more important than men's trust in wisdom, power, and riches. The passage uses the Hebrew idiom of 'not this but that' in the sense of 'that much more than this'. Wisdom and power and riches are all good, but they are quite subordinate to knowing God. Such knowing is not abstractly intellectual, but involves the whole man, and cannot be separated from doing what God does. KINDNESS (*chesed*, cf. 2.2—generous loyalty), JUSTICE (*mishpat*, cf. 5.4 f. right decision), and RIGHTEOUSNESS (*tsedaqah*—generous fair dealing) are great words of the Old Testament about the action of both God and man. This is one of the four places in the Old Testament where *chesed* and one of the 'righteousness' words are linked together (the others are Hos. 12.6; Prov. 21. 21; Ps. 101.1). True religion consists in putting God absolutely first in our life, and allowing him to fill our life with those qualities which he possesses and which we can gain by knowing, loving and serving him. The influence of this passage is to be seen in I Cor. 1.31; II Cor. 10.17; and there is perhaps an echo of v. 24 in Luke 2.14 with its reference to men in whom God is well pleased.

PUNISHMENT OF THE UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART 9.25-26

Jeremiah has already stressed the need for a circumcised heart. Here (though the verses are difficult to translate and interpret) the meaning seems to be that Judah cannot rely upon circumcision to protect her (cf. the temple sermon, 7.1-15). It is after all a practice which she shares with other nations and is no substitute for that purification of the heart which God demands (cf. Matt. 5.8; I Cor. 7.19; Rom. 2.25). All the nations mentioned practised circumcision (cf. Herodotus II

104; Ezek. 31.18; 32.19, 32; Gen. 17.22-26). The Philistines are singled out in the Old Testament for being uncircumcised.

26. that cut the corners of their hair

The RSV is here to be preferred to the AV, THAT ARE IN THE UTMOST CORNERS. Herodotus (III 8) says that some desert tribes in Arabia shaved off the hair of their temples in honour of their God. The practice is prohibited in Lev. 19.27. It is mentioned again in Jer. 25.23; 49.32. The sense of this verse is: ALL THESE NATIONS ARE UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART, but so too is THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL.

THE POWERLESSNESS OF IDOLS 10.1-16

This section breaks the connection between the end of ch. 9 and 10.17, and has marked affinities with the thought of Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa. 40.19-22; 41.7, 24, 29; 44.9-20; 46.5-7; see also Deut. 4.28; Pss. 115.3-8; 135.15-18). Whatever its value as a testimony to faith in the God of Israel as the living God, it does not seem to belong to Jeremiah, though it appears in two places in the Jeremianic tradition—here and in the repetition of vv. 12-16 in 51.15-19. Jeremiah, of course, would not have denied the truth of this passage, for he too denounced idolatry (cf. 2.1-13) but his teaching on the emptiness of idolatry has a different tone and feeling. In any event v. 11 is an intrusion into the passage—the only verse in Aramaic in Jeremiah. It is probably a formula to strengthen the faith of believing Jews in the presence of idolatrous worship. There is also some confusion in the order of the passage—a better sequence is given by inserting v. 9 in the middle of v. 4, and reading v. 8 after v. 5 and vv. 6, 7 after 16.

There are three main thoughts in the passage. One is that Israel is not to copy the customs of the nations about her, one of which is superstitious terror at comets and eclipses, and

belief in heavenly deities, not under the control of God, which bring them about. We have still fully to learn the lesson that faith in the living God is incompatible with superstition. The second emphasis is on the powerlessness of idols. Idols are things that man makes and does things to, rather than things that can make or do things to man. Thirdly, in contrast with idols stands the creative power of the God of Israel (see especially vv. 12 f.).

9. Tarshish

Otherwise Tarsessus, located in southern Spain or on the island of Sardinia (cf. Ezek. 27.12; Jonah 1.3). The name Uphaz seems to be found only here and at Dan. 10.5. Some ancient versions suggest that it may be a corruption of Ophir (mentioned in I Kings 9.28; 10.11; Isa. 13.12; Ps. 45.9), a gold-producing territory on the south-west coast of Arabia.

10. Both earthquakes and political disasters are seen as signs of the living God.

12-16. These verses are repeated in 51.15-19 (cf. Ps. 96.5; Job 38.4-7; Ps. 148.4f.; Isa. 45.18).

14-16. Idolatry is still a horrible fact of human life. But the imagery of this passage does not really strike home to condemn it, unless perhaps at v. 15.

15. they are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment (AV 'visitation') they shall perish

Idolatry has no power to re-create and transform human life. Whatever its power to hold men in bondage, when in the crisis of human life God puts it to the test, its inherently unsatisfying character is exposed even to its devotees, and even if for the time being they fall a prey to some other idolatry instead of turning to the living God.

16. portion

Read 'possession'.

GOD'S THREAT AND THE PEOPLE'S
MOURNING
10.17-22

This poem links up with the thought of 9.22. It comes from a time when Jerusalem was under siege—possibly 598 BC.

17-18. The prophet speaks. The people must pick up their bundles for God is SLINGING them OUT of their land.

19-21. In reply Jerusalem (in language Jeremiah has already used to speak of his own pain, cf. 4.19 f.) expresses her pain as a mother bereft of her children (cf. Isa. 49.14-23, 54.1-3). The affliction is due to lack of knowledge of God on the part of her rulers (=SHEPHERDS, cf. 2.8; 3.15; 23.1).

22. Jeremiah concludes 'Yes, the enemy is coming from THE NORTH' (cf. 1.14; 4.6, 15; 6.1; 25.9).

MAY GOD BE LENIENT WITH HIS PEOPLE
10.23-24

Commentators are not agreed as to whether these verses are to be taken as Jeremiah's words for himself, or Jeremiah's words for his people. Both interpretations yield a real meaning. On the one understanding these verses form part of the outpourings of Jeremiah's heart. At last he submits to God's direction of his life, he asks for amendment but pleads also for God's help. Alternatively these verses reveal Jeremiah as praying with and for a penitent people. Judah has learnt that she cannot decide her own fate, which depends upon the

purpose of God. She needs God's discipline and amendment, yet she pleads for lessening of judgment so that God's witness through his people should not be lost to the world. The people of God must be open to the full rigour of God's criticism of the way in which she falls short of her calling; but with all her faults the people of God is God's means of witness to the world, and her prosperity is essential to God's purpose.

23. Cf. Prov. 16.9; 20.24; Ps. 37.23. Man's direction of his own life is not denied; what is denied is that it can achieve its true end apart from the direction of God.

24. Cf. Pss. 6.1; 38.1.

PUNISH THE UNBELIEVING NATIONS
10.25

This verse is much the same as Ps. 79.6 f., from which it is probably derived. It is not from Jeremiah himself, because though he prayed for vengeance on his own enemies (11.20; 17.18; 18.23; 20.11) and might presumably have prayed for vengeance on his country's enemies, his determining thought was that God was using the power of other nations to bring home to Judah her sin. This is another mind looking at the same process from a different point of view. It has not much to say to us because, though the welfare of God's people is important to him, what others do to God's people must be judged in terms of their own obedience or disobedience to the will of God in so acting.

JEREMIAH'S SUPPORT OF THE COVENANT

11.1-12.6

JEREMIAH PROCLAIMS THE COVENANT 11.1-8

The whole of 11.1-14 presents a difficult historical problem. It is written in a Deuteronomistic prose style. The question is whether it is wholly due to the editor and represents a post-exilic judgment, or whether it has a genuine historical kernel. If it has such a kernel, does the covenant refer to the reform under King Josiah (II Kings 22, 23) or does it refer to the Mosaic covenant (Ex. 24)? The evidence is not really decisive. If this is evidence that Jeremiah at the time supported the Josianic reform, then it is clear that he supported it, not so much in terms of the centralizing of worship at Jerusalem, but in terms of obedience to God, which after all is the basic conception of the Book of Deuteronomy (see esp. Deut. 5-11). We can understand that Jeremiah, who felt that he had been called to be a prophet before he was born (1.5), should proclaim this greatest of all Old Testament words, the 'covenant' (*Hebrew berith*), for it is a relationship between God and the people that he has chosen. The initiative in the covenant comes from the goodness and grace of God. The choice before the people is to respond in love and obedience or disastrously to turn away in hardness of heart and disobedience. This is the presupposition of all Jeremiah's ministry.

3. cursed

Cf. Deut. 11.28; 27.26; 28.15-68; 29.20 f. Though the love of God abides for ever, the curse which comes from not doing the will of God is a sure fact of human experience.

4. the iron furnace

Cf. Deut. 4.20; I Kings 8.51. The furnace in which iron is smelted becomes a metaphor for great suffering.

5. milk and honey

This is a description of Canaan as seen from the desert. Outside the Pentateuch the phrase comes only here and in 32.22 and Ezek. 20.6, 15. This verse is full of Deuteronomistic phrases; cf. Deut. 2.30; 4.20; 6.3; 7.8; 8.18; 11.9; 26.15.

7, 8. Cf. 7.25 f. With the exception of the last phrase of v. 8 these verses are omitted by the LXX. They are out of place here, for they bring in too quickly the fact that Jeremiah's sole mission to the cities of Judah was not in fact a success. This may not have been apparent at the time.

THE DISASTROUS APOSTASY OF JUDAH 11.9-13

Whatever measure of success the Josianic reform had while King Josiah lived, after his death in 608 BC the corrupt religious practices of the reign of Manasseh came creeping back (cf. 7.17-20; 44.15-30). If vv. 1-8 refer to action by Jeremiah taken in the reign of Josiah, then we may think that vv. 9-14 come from the reign of Jehoiakim when the decline into apostasy had become apparent. Judah had become promiscuous in its religious worship (cf. 2.28).

JEREMIAH FORBIDDEN TO PRAY FOR HIS PEOPLE 11.14

See the comment on 7.16.

SACRIFICES WILL NOT SAVE GOD'S FAIR
BUT EVIL OLIVE TREE
11.15-17

15-16. These verses are a poem, badly preserved in the Hebrew, expressing a sentiment akin to those of 6.20-21; 7.21-23: VOWS AND SACRIFICIAL FLESH cannot AVERT THE DOOM of VILE DEEDS (RSV).

16. Apparently olive trees grew in the courts of the temple.

17. A prose comment from a later time—see the comment on 9.12-16.

THE OUTPOURINGS OF
JEREMIAH'S HEART

11.18-23; 12.1-6; 15.10-12, 15-21; 17.9 f., 14-18; 18.18-23;
20.7-10, 12, 11, 14-18

In the nineteenth century and after there came about a tacit agreement among scholars to pick out of the text of Jeremiah certain poems in which the heart of Jeremiah's personal faith is disclosed. These poems were often called the 'Confessions' of Jeremiah, presumably by analogy with St Augustine's *Confessions*. They are called here 'Outpourings of Jeremiah's heart'—Jeremiah's revelation to his devoted secretary Baruch of his own wrestling with God and with his own spirit. They contain two elements, dialogues between Jeremiah and God, and outbursts from Jeremiah's tormented spirit. These poems are not to be separated rigidly from all other utterances of Jeremiah, but their isolation helps the reader to lay hold upon Jeremiah's exposure of his own struggles of faith and discipline of spirit as the inner side of his inflexible ministry as a prophet of God to the people of Judah.

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART I:
JEREMIAH IN DANGER OF HIS LIFE AT
ANATHOTH: HIS PRAYER FOR VENGEANCE
11.18-23

(Note that the text of 12.1-6 is confused; 12.6 is to be read after 11.18, and 12.3b after 11.20.)

These verses give Jeremiah's response to the knowledge that his own family and friends and fellow-citizens at Anathoth

had conspired against his life. Some have thought that this plot was due to Jeremiah's having championed the Josianic Reform which dispossessed the country priests: this may be true, but it is double conjecture. We have more definite evidence in Jeremiah's temple sermon and in the stinging words of his poems announcing God's punishment of his disobedient people. What right had a man whom they all knew to say such things? Here there is a parallel with Jesus. He also had to face the hostility of his own family and city—indeed, he was put to death by his own people (Mark 3.20 f., 31-35; 6.1-6; 14.1; John 1.11).

Jeremiah's reaction to the attempt to murder him is to pray for God's vengeance upon those who have done it. This courageous fighter, under pressure, turns to God for strength and help. But he has still something to learn of the nature of the God to whom he prays; he has still to learn that the true way of God is to ask God's blessing on those who sought his life. Some of the truer way is to be found in Isaiah 53, and still more in the contrasting parallel with Jesus, who also communed with God under the stress of opposition, but who prayed for those who sought to kill him. One New Testament writer wrote of Jesus 'When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed' (1 Peter 2.23 f.).

18. The content of the Lord's disclosure is given in 12.6.

19. The lamb follows unsuspectingly with complete trust in those to whom he belongs. (But in 12.3b the men of Anathoth are also SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER.) For FRUIT read 'sap'. They plot to kill Jeremiah in the full strength of his adult life. With the attempt to prevent the name of Jeremiah being remembered compare the attempt to stop the apostles preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 4.17 f.).

20. who triest the heart and mind

RSV is preferable here to AV, THAT TRIEST THE REINS (i.e. kidneys) AND THE HEART. Cf. 12.2, FAR FROM THEIR HEART (AV, REINS). The only disadvantage of the RSV's accurate translation is that it obscures the fact that the Hebrews associated the higher mental powers with the dynamic parts of the body. Jeremiah is here appealing—and this is the heart of his 'Confessions'—to the God who tests the sincerity of the feelings and purposes of men; and he brings his own life to that testing. Jeremiah has much to learn of the nature of God, but his whole-hearted committal to him is the way of true fellowship with God and the means of growth in grace. 12.3b confirms the thought of v. 20 in another idiom.

21-22. Presumably Jeremiah's thought here is that Anathoth will not escape the disaster that is coming upon the people of Judah; he is not thinking of special vengeance meted out to them alone. There is an abiding truth in the idea of moral retribution, but there is something that strikes a chill to the heart of a Christian in a stress on unmitigated retribution unrelieved by any thought of healing grace.

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART II: WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?

12.1-6

(It has already been said that the text of this passage is confused, and that v. 6 is to be read after 11.18 and v. 3b after 11.20. Note also that v. 4 seems to be misplaced. Some would read the last clause of this verse after v. 2, because, if we read with the LXX 'God will not see our ways' (cf. 5.12 and Pss. 10.11; 73.11; 94.7), the ideas are similar. If we read with the English versions, HE WILL NOT SEE OUR LATTER END, it means that Jeremiah will not survive to see what becomes of them. The thought of the main part of v. 4 seems out of

keeping with the context, and more appropriate to 14.1-6, unless the thought is that good and bad suffer alike from the results of wickedness.)

Jeremiah is possibly the first person in Hebrew literature to raise the problem for a believer in God of the prosperity of the wicked (cf. Hab. 1.2-4, 13; Pss. 37, 49, 73, and the Book of Job). Jeremiah argues the matter with God: Why do those whose deeds are evil and whose trust in God is at best insincere prosper? And God knows that Jeremiah is not like that. We may note Jeremiah's phrase THOU SEEST ME as expressing his intimacy of fellowship with God. There is a sense of shame and disobedience that makes man hide away from God (cf. Gen. 3.8-10), but, beyond that barrier, the more a man's life is open to God, the more security he has in his fellowship with God.

5. God's reply is not to give Jeremiah a direct answer but to summon him to a new and harder form of service, using two images. If Jeremiah has been beaten in running by men on foot, how will he run against horsemen? If in a place where everything is peaceful and quiet Jeremiah has come to grief, what will he do when he has to fight against wild beasts?

The jungle (AV 'swelling') of the Jordan

✓ This was a tract of rank vegetation on the bank of the river, infested by lions; cf. 49.19=50.44; Zech. 11.3.

God's cause costs more than Jeremiah had hitherto realized. He had begun to feel the pain of belonging to God and not seeing his kingdom openly triumph. But what he needs is not easy reassurance that all is well, but spiritual reinforcement so that, even if he is burdened with far more exacting problems, his faith in God may remain firm as a rock. The mystery of men's stubborn resistance to God is more than we can plumb, and while we do well to rejoice in all new signs of response to him, we must be prepared for an ever deeper sharing of

the travail of God till his kingdom shall come. If this should happen, it will not only be a burden upon our spirits but also a great and wonderful privilege, because God's kingdom is the great and abiding reality of life.

JUDGMENT ON GOD'S PEOPLE 12.7-13.27

GOD'S MINGLED HATRED AND COMPASSION FOR HIS PEOPLE 12.7-13

In this poem Jeremiah follows Hosea in interpreting the mind of God from his own experience. Not only Jeremiah but God is hurt by the desolation of Judah: not only Jeremiah but God is hostile to Judah's wickedness.

The historical background to the poem is probably the events recorded in II Kings 24.1 f.: Jehoiakim after three years of subservience to Babylon revolted (about 602 BC) and Nebuchadrezzar sent marauding bands of his own people and Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites. Jeremiah sees in this God's anger against his people, but none the less thinks that God is distressed at the devastation his people suffer.

We may note the variety of images used for Judah. God calls her MY HOUSE, MY HERITAGE, THE BELOVED OF MY SOUL, a roaring LION, a SPECKLED BIRD OF PREY, MY VINEYARD, MY PLEASANT POSSESSION (cf. Hos. 8.1; 9.15; I Sam. 10.1; I Kings 8.53; II Kings 21.14; Isa. 56.9; Jer. 2.21; 5.10; Isa. 5.1-7).

12-13. This is the prophet's comment. The phrase THE SWORD OF THE LORD is understandable in the context, but it has had fateful and fatal consequences (cf. 47.6 and 48.10). The THEY of v. 13 refers to the people of Judah. Their labour has been utterly in vain (contrast I Cor. 15.58).

GOD'S JUDGMENT AND MERCY ON
NEIGHBOURING PEOPLES
12.14-17

This passage has been said to be 'a fresh new word of great spiritual breadth and international tolerance' (E. A. Leslie). This may be true, even though the thought may not have come from Jeremiah. The conviction that people of other nations may turn to Israel's God, that the restored community may be the centre of a redeemed world, is certainly present at a later time (cf. Isa. 2.2-4; 19.19-22; 56.6 f.). But in its present context the neighbours who have been doing the Lord's work are now described as evil. Judah is apparently in exile among foreign nations, and THE WAYS OF GOD'S PEOPLE which Jeremiah has been condemning (2.23, 33; 3.21; 4.18) are here the practice of the true covenant relation with God. Notice that here, as at 46.26; 48.47; 49.6, 39, God's purpose of restoration towards other nations is emphasized. The holding together of God's electing love for his people and his purpose of good for all nations was a lesson only slowly learned.

THE PARABLE OF THE RUINED LOIN-CLOTH
13.1-11

This prose parable must come from Jeremiah himself, and its meaning is quite clear. Judah has become corrupted from her true allegiance to God by Mesopotamian (Assyrian) influences (cf. 2.18) and is now useless. The Hebrew prophets often used symbolic actions as part of their prophesying. They were thought not only to express in dramatic fashion the message of the prophet, but also to help to bring about the result symbolized. For the use of prophetic symbolism in Jeremiah see 16.5-8; 27.11; 28.10-14; 32.6-15; 43.8-13; 51.63 f.

It seems quite unlikely that Jeremiah undertook two

journeys to the river Euphrates and back again—a total of 1,600 miles. The journey one way took Ezra four months (Ezra 7.9). The reader may like to think that it was merely a spoken parable, or else a vision or a dream; or, what is more likely, that Jeremiah acted out token journeys so that all could see.

11. This verse is a later comment, which brings out one detail of the parable, viz. that as a loin-cloth clings to its wearer, so the people of God is meant to cling to God (cf. Deut. 10.20; 11.22; 13.4; 30.20; Josh. 22.5; 23.8; II Kings 18.6). The closing phrase, BUT THEY WOULD NOT LISTEN (cf. 16.12), is unhappily true to much prophetic experience (and cf. Mark 4.9).

THE PARABLE OF THE WINE-JARS
13.12-14

In this second prose parable Jeremiah has given the first sketch of his image of the cup of the wine of the wrath of God which the nations are to drink (see 25.15-28; 51.7, and cf. Ezek. 23.31-34; Isa. 51.17; Pss. 60.3; 75.8 and Rev. 14.8, 10; 16.19; 17.2). It is a grim image and one that horrifies Jeremiah himself. Jeremiah picks up a commonplace saying, probably meant to express confidence in prosperity ahead, and they jeer at him for his triteness. But he is not being trite. He is seeking to open their eyes to the imminent prospect that just as jars are destined to be FILLED WITH WINE, so the people of Judah great and small will be FILLED WITH DRUNKENNESS, and DASHED AGAINST ONE ANOTHER until they are destroyed. Here the harshness of the word comes from the fact that the distinction is not drawn between what God permits to happen as the result of man's sin, and what is God's inner affection and purpose towards sinful man. The words I WILL NOT PITY OR SPARE OR HAVE COMPASSION refer not to God's intention but to the horrible facts of political disaster. Cf. 21.7, where they are applied to Nebuchadrezzar and are more in place.

JEREMIAH'S GRIEF FOR JUDAH'S
FALSE PRIDE
13.15-17

This little poem epitomizes the pathos of Jeremiah's feeling for his people. They cling to their false pride rather than listen to the voice of the living God. They will not give God that glory which is the worship of true obedience. They are like travellers on the mountain side caught in a dark cloud. While they wait for the cloud to pass, and the light to come again, the night comes upon them and plunges them into utter DARKNESS. This is a matter of deep distress to Jeremiah: his soul **WEEPS IN SECRET** for his country's false **PRIDE**: for it has brought captivity to Judah (probably the captivity of 597 BC). Other instances of Jeremiah's grief are to be found in 8.21-9.1; 14.17; 15.17; 20.8.

DISASTER HAS COME UPON KING
JEHOIACHIN AND HIS MOTHER
13.18-19

There are eight passages in the Book of Jeremiah which specially concern King Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah or Coniah), the son of King Jehoiakim, who reigned for three months in 597 BC before being taken off to Babylon in exile. Three of them are prophecies by Jeremiah of which this is the second. I. 22.24 (explained in 22.25 f.): Jehoiachin will go into exile. II. 13.18 f.: The disaster has happened. III. 22.28-30: Jehoiachin will not return from exile. The other five passages are: Jeremiah's vision of the two baskets of figs which concerns the difference between those remaining in Jerusalem, and the exiles, including King Jehoiachin in Babylon (ch. 24); Jeremiah's warning to the priests that not only will the temple ornaments not be brought back, but the

remainder will also be taken away (27.16-22); Hananiah's prophecy that Jehoiachin will return from exile (28.1-4); Jeremiah's insistence that the exiles must settle down in Babylon (29.1-32); and the final word at the end of the book that after thirty-seven years of imprisonment Jehoiachin received kindly treatment (52.31-34 = II Kings 25.27-30).

This poem was addressed to Jehoiachin and his mother, Queen Nehushta (II Kings 24.9) at the end of his reign. Queen Mothers always had an important position at court (cf. I Kings 2.19; 15.13), and as Jehoiachin was only eighteen years old, Nehushta probably had great influence over him during his brief reign. Jeremiah mentions her twice more, though not by name (22.26; 29.2). For an account of Jehoiachin's reign see II Kings 24.8-17.

18. Whatever their royal dignity, they must accept the fact that the predicted disaster has come true.

19. The Negeb

The southern portion of Judah was the first object of attack, and Jerusalem was unable to relieve it. The second part of the verse is not to be taken literally. Only a small section of the population went INTO EXILE. But defeat was certain.

THE SHAME OF JERUSALEM
13.20-27

This prophecy is commonly dated in the reign of Jehoiakim after 605, when Nebuchadrezzar defeated Pharaoh Neco. Jehoiakim at first paid tribute to Babylon but later rebelled.

20-22. Jerusalem, personified as a woman, is bidden to look at the enemy FROM THE NORTH, and to give account of her stewardship of THE FLOCK entrusted to her. Will she not be in anguish (cf. 4.31) when her friend has become her master?

If she asks why this has happened, let her know that it is because of her sin that her shame is exposed and that she suffers violence.

23-24. These verses may be misplaced here. They are not meant to teach a fatalistic inevitability. They are simply a statement of how hard it is for human beings to break free from the ingrained habit of sinning (cf. Hos. 5.4; John 8.34) and because of that sin disaster will come.

25-26. Because Jerusalem has forgotten God, God will himself be active in exposing her shame and her infidelities.

In this prophecy the degradation of captivity is contrasted with the degradation of sin. Sin has a stubborn power to hold men captive and to take away from them the knowledge of God and the knowledge of themselves in which the secret of life consists.

27. But Jeremiah is still hopeful. So he asks pathetically HOW LONG WILL IT BE BEFORE YOU ARE MADE CLEAN? (cf. Hos 8.5). There must have been a time when his certainty of the disaster that would come and his hope that his people would repent in time struggled within him for mastery, until at last the light of this hope was quenched in him.

ORACLES ASSOCIATED WITH THE DROUGHT: GOD'S REJECTION OF HIS PEOPLE'S APPEALS 14.1-15.9

This section, with a heading CONCERNING THE DROUGHT, covers two different situations, 14.1-16 and 14.17-15.4, and also adds a picture of the ensuing destruction, 15.5-9. The

section as a whole contains many of the essential concerns of Jeremiah—the people's half-hearted seeking of God's blessing, the false prophecy that speaks of an easy peace without probing the people's sin, Jeremiah's own pleading with God for his people, and his acceptance of the rightness of God's rejection.

FIRST SITUATION: THE PLIGHT OF MEN AND ANIMALS 14.1-6

Judah is in distress because of the drought that is upon her—her cities (vv. 2 f.); the countryside (v. 4) and the animals (vv. 5 f.).

1. This is an editorial heading (cf. 46.1; 47.1; 49.34).

2. gates

Here used for cities, cf. Deut. 5.14; 12.12, 15 (AV and RV)

3-4. cover their heads

For this expression of grief, cf. II Sam. 15.30; 19.5.

5-6. Even THE HIND, well known for the affectionate care of her young, is heartless because of her own desperate need; even the tough WILD ASSES, who can survive on almost nothing, are in real distress.

THE PEOPLE'S CONFESSION AND APPEAL TO GOD 14.7-9

In their need the people turn to God and confess their sin. But they are less concerned with their sin than with the awk-

ward position that they think God finds himself in. Judah is in distress, and this makes it seem as though God either has no real connection with Judah, or is powerless to do anything to help her. The repeated question 'WHY?' is not 'Why has Judah disobeyed her God?' but 'Why has God not done something about it before this?' Judah is in fact saying to God, 'You must help us. O God, you must, you must.'

7. The NAME of God may mean God's reputation, as it seems to do here, but it may also mean God's nature as revealed in the covenant, which is the ultimate ground of prayer. But the people seem to have little understanding of the name. (For the use of the phrase see Josh. 7.9; Isa. 48.9-11; Pss. 23.3; 25.11; 31.3; 79.9; 106.8; 109.21; 143.11; Ex. 33.19; 34.5-7; Ezek. 20.9, 14, 44. The idea is elaborated in Num. 14.13-16.)

8. A stranger

A resident alien who has no stake in the country nor responsibility for it.

GOD'S REJECTION OF HIS PEOPLE'S APPEAL 14.10

For Jeremiah physical distress and political disaster are more intimately bound up with relation to God than distinctions of thought slowly forged through the centuries allow us to think. For us this verse is not God's answer to people afflicted with drought (cf. the comment on 3.1-5); it is God's answer to their shallow and disobedient state of mind. Judah turns to God for help in time of need, but not because she loves God's way of life; she does it only as a temporary expedient. So God rejects an appeal which has no turning of life behind it. (With the final phrase cf. Hos. 8.13.)

JEREMIAH FORBIDDEN TO PRAY FOR HIS PEOPLE 14.11-12

See the comment on 7.16. No solemn day of fasting and sacrifice will prevent God's purpose of punishment happening. Indeed they are to suffer worse than the drought—war, with FAMINE AND PESTILENCE. The burden of approaching disaster, which he could not and others would not prevent, lay heavy on Jeremiah's spirit.

JEREMIAH'S PLEA FOR HIS PEOPLE: THE PROPHETS HAD MISLED THEM 14.13

Jeremiah cannot help pleading with God for his people. They have been misled by the prophets.

Though there have been many references to the prophets already (cf. 2.8; 5.30 f.; 6.13 f.), 14.13-16 is the beginning of Jeremiah's reckoning with the prophets. All his 'Confessions' are relevant to the understanding of what is true prophecy, but his teaching on the subject is gathered together in 23.9-33, and chs. 26-29 give an account of some of his more important particular conflicts.

The prophets have rightly presented God as the comforter and helper of his people—but they have left out the inescapable complementary fact that the same God is inexorable in his religious and moral demands. The context is wider than the drought situation—the prophets have promised that because God is God neither physical distress nor political disaster shall touch his people. But this is not true.

DISASTER FOLLOWS THE PROPHECYING
OF LIES IN GOD'S NAME
14.14-16

Jeremiah's problem is that those who have just as good credentials as he has to speak in the name of Jahweh, the God of Judah, have in fact prophesied, and still do so in opposition to him, saying what he believes to be quite contrary to the will of God. So he is driven to the conclusion that God did not send these prophets and that their words are not God's truth. What they say is due partly to lack of real insight into the situation and partly to self-deception. Jeremiah, of course, has no infallible way of convincing others who it is who is actually speaking in the name of God, for this is a question in dispute. He can only put forward his stubbornly rooted conviction deepened by experience. Yet other people must also have conviction in order to accept it. All assent to God's word demands the venture of faith.

The upshot will be that those who have said that neither physical distress nor political disaster shall touch God's people will be overwhelmed by these very things, and so too will be the people who trusted in their word.

16. wickedness

This means here 'the result of their wickedness'.

SECOND SITUATION: JEREMIAH MOURNS
OVER WAR AND FAMINE CAUSED BY
IGNORANCE OF GOD
14.17-18

Already, as we have seen, the situation has widened out from the drought of vv. 1-6 and now it is war (THE SWORD) that is in the foreground with accompanying FAMINE. Jeremiah

has already shown plainly how deeply the coming devastation distresses him (see 8.18-9.1; 13.17), and here this finds renewed expression.

17. the virgin daughter of my people

The word VIRGIN here means 'inviolable' (cf. 18.13; 31.4, 21; 46.11). God's people are called upon to have an unsullied love for him. Even though the sexual metaphors applied to the relation between God and his people are mixed, the meaning is quite clear.

18. Read, with RSV, FOR BOTH PROPHET AND PRIEST PLY THEIR TRADE THROUGH THE LAND, AND HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE. The Hebrew is difficult. The last phrase may mean that priest and prophet have become distracted by the appalling disaster, but it probably traces back the cause of the trouble once again to lack of knowledge of God and to disobedience to him (cf. 5.20-25; 8.4-7).

THE PEOPLE'S SECOND CONFESSION
AND APPEAL TO GOD
14.19-22

In Jeremiah's second expression of the people's appeal to God there is more anguish, but little if any more turning to God. The people ask, in distress but in confidence, 'HAST THOU UTTERLY REJECTED JUDAH?' not expecting the answer 'Yes' which was to come (15.1-4), though in fact the truth was that Judah had REJECTED God (15.6). St Paul was to ask the same question with a deeper concern (Rom. 11.1).

19. The expression of the people's anguish (the second part of the verse has occurred previously at 8.15).

20. An almost perfunctory acknowledgment of sin.

21. Three reasons why God ought not to neglect to help his people, as he has been doing—first there is his own reputation; secondly he ought not to bring disgrace upon the temple (where God was supposed to be enthroned on the cherubim within the holy of holies; cf. I Sam. 4.4; II Sam. 6.2; II Kings 19.15; Pss. 80.1; 99.1); thirdly, God must not break his covenant with his people. This shows no advance in religious insight on vv. 7 f. It seeks to compel God to honour his obligations. It shows no awareness of Jeremiah's own conviction that the very disasters of which they complained were evident signs that God was taking his covenant obligations very seriously indeed.

22. The people only love God for what they can get from him. This verse presupposes the original drought situation—unless indeed the devastation of war had made the need for rain even more acute.

EVEN THE PRAYER OF MOSES AND SAMUEL
WOULD BE UNAVAILING

15.1

This is another instance of Jeremiah's sense of being forbidden to pray for his people (see the comment on 7.16). The plight of Judah is due not to the ineffectiveness of Jeremiah's praying, but to their own sin. Not even Moses and Samuel—famous for their intercession on behalf of their people (see Ex. 32.11-14, 30-32; Num. 14.13-24; Deut. 9.18-20, 25-29; I Sam. 7.8 f.; 12.19-23; Ps. 99.6-8)—would have made any difference.

Send them out of my sight

That is, 'Do not remind me of this people.' We can only speak of prayer in imperfect terms. It is not God's unwillingness to be reminded of Judah which is the cause of their captivity but their rejection of his purpose for them.

GOD'S FINAL REJECTION OF HIS
PEOPLE'S APPEALS

15.2-4

2-3. These verses express Jeremiah's conviction that political subjection was inevitable. It must have been a grim day for him when he finally came to the conclusion that nothing could avert the impending disaster, and that the only ground of faith and hope was to accept this at the hands of God.

4. This is clearly a comment from the Deuteronomistic editor. The sin of Manasseh is given as the cause of the captivity of Judah in II Kings 21.11-15; 23.26 f.; 24.3 f. It is unlikely that Jeremiah thought this way. He was always concerned to bring home to his people their own sin, that they might turn to God, and in turning to him find forgiveness and newness of life (cf. 4.1 f.).

GOD'S WINNOWING OF HIS PEOPLE

15.5-9

The section ends with a picture of the ruthless winnowing which will take place when the long-impending disaster at last comes. The tenses used are for the most part perfect. This is the prophetic perfect in which action which has not yet begun is pictured as being already completed. Jeremiah is seeing the desolation before it comes. As we heard earlier of the wrath of God which Jeremiah was weary of holding back (see 6.11-15), so the same image is applied to God who is weary of relenting towards his people. The reason is basic to Jeremiah's thought: they would not turn to God with that fundamental turning which is the source of life in God. As a result there comes on God's people this horrible desolation.

5. bemoan

Read 'commiserate with'.

7. Compare John the Baptist's use of the image of winnowing in Matt. 3.12.

gates

Cities (cf. 14.2).

a destroyer at noon-day

See the comment on 6.1-8.

9. The mother of seven was the Hebrew type of complete happiness (cf. I Sam. 2.5; Ruth 4.15). Her happiness is now the source of her desolation, for there is no one left to carry on her name.

'CONFESSIONS' AND SPEECHES

15.10-20.18

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART III:
THE PROPHET COMPLAINS OF HIS EXISTENCE
15.10-12

Here we are introduced even more intimately to the pain and difficulty of being a prophet of God. Jeremiah is exposed to a double loneliness. The harshness of the message he is driven to proclaim isolates him from his people. At the same time his imperfect identification of himself with God and his purposes for him makes a gulf between himself and God. This is true even while he criticizes his people for not knowing God and even while he proclaims in God's name that message which isolates him from his people.

Jeremiah, it is clear, had a naturally friendly and affectionate disposition and a sensitive spirit. It is a bitter thing to him that his faithfulness to his prophetic calling has exposed him to the continual hostility of his people. Had he been perpetually exacting money or perpetually borrowing from others and refusing to pay back it would have been understandable. But nothing that he has ever said has meant a lack of caring. It has all sprung out of a deep compassion for his people. Is not Jeremiah attempting the impossible? Alas that he was ever born.

10. Cf. 20.14-18. The greatness of Jeremiah comes from the fact that he not only felt and expressed this pain at being the kind of person he was in the kind of situation he was in, but

that he bore it and overcame it and used it for the fulfilment of his prophetic ministry.

11. The Hebrew is difficult. Read with RSV, SO LET IT BE, O LORD, IF I HAVE NOT ENTREATED THEE FOR THEIR GOOD, IF I HAVE NOT PLEADED WITH THEE ON BEHALF OF THE ENEMY IN THE TIME OF TROUBLE AND IN THE TIME OF DISTRESS.

12. This verse is also difficult. If it belongs to the 'Confessions' of the prophet, then it is a complaint that the forces against him are too strong to overcome. If this is right then God's answer to him (v. 20, cf. 12.5) is that Jeremiah must become stronger than the forces against him and wear them down. This God can enable him to do. Alternatively, if it is a saying addressed to the people, it points them to the folly of trying conclusions with the immense power of Babylon.

THE SIN OF JUDAH AND THE FIRE OF GOD'S
ANGER
15.13-14

These verses are repeated and expanded in their true context at 17.3-4. See the comment there.

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART IN
HIS COMPLAINT AND GOD'S ANSWER
15.15-21

Jeremiah's complaint takes two forms—one, that he shall be vindicated against his enemies; the other—the deeper side of the same problem—that he shall be given a deeper assurance that he is right in trusting God. Both of them are pleas that

in the loneliness of his mission he shall be given a certainty to which he has not attained. When we consider Jeremiah's dealing with other prophets (see esp. 14.14-16; 23.9-32 and ch. 28) we must remember that behind the inflexible firmness of his public action lay this desperate grappling with the problem that, when he was out of step with everyone else about God's character and will, perhaps it was he who was wrong and not everyone else.

Note that Jeremiah's complaint and uncertainty takes place within the context of his faith in God. It has been well said that, for Jeremiah, God 'remains so awfully personal and present even in his absence'.¹ Jeremiah wants God to REMEMBER him (cf. Pss. 25.6; 74.2, 18, 22; 89.47, 50), for God's upholding him by thinking of him is what Jeremiah lives by, and to VISIT him, not for punishment, as often with this word, but for strengthening and blessing, and to take vengeance on his persecutors (for other instances of this last cf. 11.20; 12.3; 17.18; 18.23; 20.11; and see the comment on 11.18-23). Jeremiah, of course, needs to be upheld against pressure from outside; but he asks God for more than this; he wants their discomfiture while he is still alive to see it. So he says to God: IN THY FORBEARANCE (for them) TAKE NOT AWAY (my life). If Jeremiah's attitude to his persecutors needs correction in a Christian perspective, let us remember that it was indeed for God's sake that he bore reproach (cf. Matt. 5.11 f.) and that his fellowship with God was real even though he had no vision of a life to come.

God's word was to Jeremiah initially both food and rejoicing (cf. Ezek. 2.8-3.3; John 4.32-34; Rev. 10.8-11). The LXX makes the rejoicing conditional on the consuming of those who despise God's words, and some prefer to follow this thought as more in keeping with Jeremiah's distress. But no one can study Jeremiah without realizing his great capacity for rejoicing in happier circumstances, and we may rightly cherish this suggestion that initially it was a joy and the

¹S. R. Hopper in *The Interpreter's Bible* 5, p. 942.

delight of his heart to make God's revelation part of his life.

But the effect of God's revelation to him was immediately to set him apart from human enjoyment of life because of his indignation at man's disobedience to God. The HAND of God represents the presence of God himself (see 1.4), the pressure of God's truth upon the spirit of the prophet. Here the burden of that pressure is emphasized. (For other instances of the hand of God see 1.9; I Kings 18.46; II Kings 3.15; Isa. 8.11; Ezek. 1.3; 3.14, 22; 37.1; 40.1.)

And so he was in agony—agony because of the horrible destiny which he was proclaiming as inevitable for his beloved country, and agony because of the complete absence of any external verification that what he was proclaiming as the truth of God was in fact the truth of God. He had told the people that they had turned away from God, the fountain of living waters (2.13); he is now beginning to wonder whether God himself is not like a stream that dries up when its water is needed most.

This is the ultimate testing of the prophetic certainty. Will Jeremiah run away from the possibility that the understanding of God on which he has staked everything is wrong, or will he bear with his doubts until they are resolved in a stronger, firmer certainty of God's presence and power? Dr John Baillie has written, 'To the perplexed seeker whose most diligent seeking for truth has seemed to lead away from God and Christ it must be said, "Do not stop seeking, but look still deeper. Do not stop thinking, but think harder. Do not be less honest with yourself, but more honest."' My own testimony would have to be that in the long run nothing but harm has come to my faith from the many occasions on which I have yielded to the temptation of foreclosing my enquiries because they seemed to be leading me away from the faith rather than towards it. Whenever I have deliberately half-closed my eyes, for fear of seeing something inconvenient, I have always had to go back over that part of the road and

walk it again with eyes as wide open as I could force them. For whatever it is that we are able to find by deliberately closing our eyes to what we fear to find, it is not God. It is an idol of our own imagining and not the true God. The true God is rather He who will be found by us, when, through keeping our eyes valiantly open to all that we now see, it is thereby given to us to see yet more.¹

God's answer to Jeremiah is of the same kind as that already given at 12.5. It is given in terms of Jeremiah's fundamental conception of 'turning' (see 3.1-4.2, and especially 4.2). The only answer to these doubts and uncertainties, to this pain and anguish, is a new and deeper turning to God on the part of Jeremiah himself. Only in that turning is God's hold on Jeremiah and Jeremiah's hold on God steadfast and secure. There must be no giving up by the prophet of his discrimination between what is precious and what is worthless, because on the prophet's faithfulness depends his capacity to speak for God (cf. Ex. 4.16). But because of Jeremiah's turning to God in the core of his being, the turning that will take place on the human plane will not be Jeremiah's succumbing to the mighty forces about him, to the pressure of a different understanding of the mind and will of God, it will be these many others turning towards the greater reality embodied in Jeremiah (cf. 37.16-21). In fact God will make of Jeremiah—this hesitant, sensitive, fearful, uncertain man—A FORTIFIED WALL OF BRONZE that nothing whatever can break (cf. 1.18 f.). He will not be taken out of the struggle and uncertainty, but in it he will have the certainty of the presence and power of God, who will enable him to do his work effectively in spite of the wicked and the ruthless. The only answer to difficulties in God's service is deeper commitment and more arduous service. But in this is given a deeper certainty of God.

¹ *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 1942, p. 23.

THE COST OF JEREMIAH'S VOCATION 16.1-9

JEREMIAH MUST HAVE NEITHER WIFE NOR CHILD 16.1-4

Verses 1-9 of this chapter are written in a Deuteronomistic prose style, but there is no reason to doubt that what they speak of goes back to Jeremiah himself. We do not, of course, know at what stage in his ministry this thought came to him.

Other prophets found in their experience of married life reinforcement of their prophetic message (cf. Hos. 1.2-9; Isa. 8.3 f.; Ezek. 24.15-27). Jeremiah, it is clear, did not remain unmarried because of any inhuman aversion from the common ways of living; nor should we think of it as an artificial symbolic action which other prophets of doom did not share. But at some point there came to him the conviction that his unmarried state was part of God's purpose for his whole life, and a witness to that doom which God was bringing on his people. We may note that the apostle Paul advised against marriage 'in view of the impending distress' (I Cor. 7.26).

JEREMIAH MUST NEITHER MOURN NOR FEAST WITH HIS PEOPLE 16.5-9

Jeremiah's interest in the ordinary life of his people is undiminished by his prophetic ministry. Yet that ministry makes a difference. It sets him apart (cf. 15.17), or so he sometimes thinks. He cannot share in the ordinary mourning of his people, because of the greater doom hanging over them which

they will not recognize nor try to avert. Nor can he share in the ordinary merry-making, though he lingers lovingly over it in spirit, because of the deep threat that hangs over it all, and because men have turned away from the greater and more fundamental rejoicing in God which is really the source of it all.

6-7. Interesting as a record of popular mourning customs which are mentioned without either approval or disapproval. Self-mutilation and shaving of the head for the dead are forbidden in Deut. 14.1 (cf. Lev. 19.28), but self-mutilation is referred to in 41.5 and 47.5, and shaving of the head in 41.4; Amos 8.10; Micah 1.16; Isa. 22.12; Ezek. 7.18.

7. No one shall break bread for the mourner (RSV)

Apparently it was the custom for a mourner to fast till evening on the day of the burial (cf. II Sam. 1.12; 3.35; 12.16-23). Then his friends broke bread for him and gave him the cup of consolation. Note how the Last Supper (I Cor. 11.23-26) is rooted in, and is the transformation of these ancient customs.

9. see the note on 7.34.

JUDAH'S PUNISHMENT WILL BE
BOTH DESERVED AND COMPLETE
16.10-18

GOD'S PUNISHMENT IS DUE TO JUDAH'S SIN
16.10-13

Cf. 5.18 f.; 22.8 f.; and see the note on 9.12-16. This is Jeremiah's insight accepted and reduced to a formula by those who followed him. We note that the disaster of the exile is accepted as God's doing (contrast 14.8 f.), that the sins of the fathers are linked up with the present STUBBORN EVIL WILL, and that the heart of the matter is REFUSING TO LISTEN to God (cf. 13.11). The passage accepts the popular view of ancient Israel, that change of country involved change of the object of worship (cf. I Sam. 26.19). Contrast with this Jeremiah's attitude in 29.7.

THE RETURN FROM EXILE IS A GREATER
DELIVERANCE THAN EVEN THE EXODUS
ITSELF
16.14-15

This remarkable and important prophecy is repeated with slight changes in 23.7 f., where it is more in place. See the comment there. It is perhaps given here to soften or compensate for the effect of the preceding verses.

NO ESCAPE FROM GOD
16.16-18

These verses link up again with v. 13, and we return to

earlier images of the coming devastation. As Jeremiah has been bidden to glean among his people (6.9) and God has spoken of the winnowing process (15.5-9) here God is sending FISHERS (to make the large haul) and HUNTERS (to deal with those who escape its sweep) so that none shall escape his purpose of destruction (cf. 4.27-29). (For the thought see Amos 9.1-4, and for the fishers cf. Amos 4.2; Hab. 1.14-17; Ezek. 12.13; 29.4 f.)

18. A later comment which sees in the lifeless images of the idols (CARCASSES, cf. Lev. 26.30) an iniquity deserving a double penalty (cf. Isa. 40.2).

GOD'S POWER TO BLESS THE GOOD
AND PUNISH THE EVIL
16.19-17.8

THE POWER AND MIGHT OF THE TRUE GOD
16.19-21

Whether or not this poem comes from Jeremiah it is deservedly called by A. S. Peake 'this great utterance'. The God of Israel and Judah is the living God of the whole earth and is the light of every man. If this is no easy word for Christian living in a multi-religioned world, where the representatives of great religions are not likely easily to COME AND SAY, 'OUR FATHERS HAVE INHERITED NOUGHT BUT LIES', yet we must believe that in Christ the truth in every religion can be given its full meaning and that all men can know in him the true God. There are overtones of Jeremiah here (cf. 2.1-13) but also suggestions of Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa. 45.14-17) and of Ezekiel (36.23). Whether Jeremiah with all the pressure of the impending fall of Jerusalem came to think like this we cannot quite be sure.

THE SIN OF JUDAH AND THE FIRE OF
GOD'S ANGER
17.1-4

Although this poem seems to have been accidentally omitted by the LXX, it expresses Jeremiah's deep conviction that because Judah's sin is deeply engraved on the hearts of her people, and in the kind of worship that is being offered, she must go into exile and lose her treasures. Jeremiah's insistence that sin is ENGRAVED ON THE TABLET OF THEIR HEART paves the way for his culminating proclamation of a new covenant in which, instead of sin, the knowledge of God would be written on their hearts (31.33).

1. For the deep-rooted nature of sin cf. 2.20-22; 5.1-11; 13.23. An iron stylus (cf. Job 19.24) was used to cut inscriptions on stone or rock.

The horns of their altars

This symbolizes the worship of Judah. In some rites blood was smeared on the horns of the altar (see Ex. 29.12; Lev. 4.7, 8.15; 16.18), and there was a time in which fugitives were safe from pursuit if they laid hold of the horns of the altar (see I Kings 1.50 f.; 2.28). But the worship is stained by disobedience and by pagan importations (cf. 7.1-34).

2. Asherim

These (AV 'groves') were poles put up by the side of the altars (Deut. 16.21) and were the normal setting of Canaanite worship.

3-4. These verses are also found at 15.13 f.

Because of Judah's sin her treasures will be taken away, and her hold on God's heritage, which was not unconditional as she supposed, will be loosened, and she will SERVE, not

foreign gods, as at 16.13, but HER ENEMIES in an unknown land. For Judah has, as Artur Weiser has put it, 'no means of defence in her hand against the wrath of the living God'; but the anger of God must be considered here as always an instrument of his grace (see the comment on 4.3-4 and on 6.11-15).

THE DIFFERENCE WHICH TRUST IN GOD
MAKES
17.5-8

Whether or not this poem is by Jeremiah, the contrast between the man whose ultimate trust is in human cleverness and the man whose ultimate trust is in God (cf. Isa. 31.3) is at the heart of all Jeremiah's ministry. The reason why some have wanted to deny it to Jeremiah is because of his own harsh experience and his harsh expectation for others (cf. 45. 1-5). But there is another side to all this. It may fairly be said that we can see in the life of Jeremiah himself a good example of vv. 7-8. He is the man who trusts in the Lord, he remains firm under pressure, there is always new life in him and he continues to bear God's fruit in a hostile environment. Whether we contrast him with the ruthless Jehoiakim or the moral weakling Zedekiah, by comparison they are stunted SHRUBS IN THE DESERT (RSV). The contrast between 'trusting in man' and 'trusting in God' underlies all Jeremiah said or wrote, and he himself knew abundantly the refreshing sustenance which came from God. The author of the first Psalm voices a judgment similar to this passage.

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART
V: GOD UNDERSTANDS EVEN THE
DECEITFULNESS OF THE HUMAN HEART
17.9-10

Here again we have Jeremiah's complaint and God's answer.

9. corrupt

AV 'wicked'; read 'sick'. Whose heart is DECEITFUL and SICK that Jeremiah cannot UNDERSTAND it? The answer must be twofold, as always in Jeremiah. He looks outward on his people and he finds there a self-deception and an instability that appals him; and then he looks inward within himself, and finds within himself, if not the same things, at least disloyalties and uncertainties such as seem to put him in the same category as the people he is denouncing. Jeremiah goes to the limit in his relentless probing (cf. 6.27-30) of the truth of God and the nature of man.

God's answer is the same fundamental answer to which the 'Confessions' bear witness (cf. 11.18-23; 12.1-6 and especially 11.20; 12.3).

10. I the Lord search the mind and try the heart

God understands and responds to man where he is and in relation to what he does. No sin, no self-deception, no sickness, no uncertainty can ever take man beyond the reach of God's searching, testing judgment, with the possibility that he might respond and live.

CHEATS NEVER PROSPER
17.11

like the partridge that gathers a brood which she did not hatch
The RSV is to be followed here. Jeremiah may have

applied this proverb to King Jehoiakim: we do not know. If so, it may have had an immediate pungency that we cannot now recover. As a general maxim, it has enough truth, like the proverb 'honesty is the best policy' to make the cautious pause, but not enough truth to deter the man who is not set on doing right for its own sake.

GOD IS THE HOPE OF ISRAEL
17.12-13

12. This may be an isolated fragment glorifying the temple and not by Jeremiah; but it seems best to link it with v. 13 and take the two verses together as praising God. The temple is at best a symbol for the reality of God's presence, and it is the heavenly throne of glory which is man's true sanctuary that the prophet is addressing.

13. All who TURN AWAY FROM God are written in dust rather than in the 'book of life' (cf. Ex. 32.32; Luke 10.20). They have turned away from THE HOPE OF ISRAEL (cf. 14.8), THEY HAVE FORSAKEN . . . THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER (cf. 2.13).

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART
VI: LET GOD VINDICATE JEREMIAH!
17.14-18

Here is only Jeremiah's urgent prayer, without the answer that God makes to it. Jeremiah appeals to God for healing and deliverance, for God is his PRAISE. This is clearly true: he lives by God and for God. But he is subject not merely to opposition but to ridicule (cf. 5.12-14). His stinging and biting words about the coming disaster are impressive if they are based on fact, but if they are only words they are ridiculous (cf. Isa. 5.19). Jeremiah protests to God, 'I HAVE

NOT PRESSED THEE TO SEND EVIL' (RSV);—a prediction of the ravaging of his beloved country was the last thing that he wanted to say; and all that he has said came from the presence of God (RSV, BEFORE THY FACE). If God should now become hostile to Jeremiah, Jeremiah is lost, because he depends upon God to face the terror outside. God must vindicate Jeremiah by exposing, dismaying and destroying his persecutors (cf. 11.20; 12.3; 15.15; 18.23; 20.11). This latter thought, with which we are by now unfortunately familiar, is not in conflict with v. 16. Disaster to his country Jeremiah has never sought—on the contrary it has been at the cost of much personal anguish that he has proclaimed it. But he needs to be proved right that God's truth might be vindicated—this is the element of truth in all his prayers for vengeance.

THE WELL-BEING OF JERUSALEM DEPENDS
UPON BEARING NO BURDENS ON THE
SABBATH DAY
17.19-27

This is a later Deuteronomistic addition possibly inserted as an illustration of 16.11. We can picture a faithful but not very acute follower of Jeremiah saying to himself, 'Jeremiah prophesied disaster because of the people's disobedience to God; not to keep the sabbath day is disobedience to God; therefore Jeremiah prophesied disaster if men did not keep the sabbath day.' But, firstly, it must be said that this is in place in post-exilic times when after the great upheaval there was a great need to re-establish the traditions and practices belonging to the people of God (cf. Neh. 13.15-22; Isa. 56.2-6; 58.13 f.) Secondly, it is clear, not that Jeremiah would not have spoken about the sabbath day, but that he would not have said *this* about the sabbath day. One of his great themes was that God is greater than all the means of grace, and that it was possible to hold on to the means of grace, and yet be

utterly disobedient to God in mind and heart. He would not have made the fate of Jerusalem depend on a formal ritual observance not necessarily related to a transformed way of living (cf. 7.1-15). If he had spoken about KEEPING THE SABBATH DAY HOLY (vv. 22, 24, 27; cf. Ex. 20.8, 10; Deut. 5.14) then he would have connected it more penetratingly with the people's ultimate allegiance to God than merely by forbidding them to CARRY A BURDEN.

26. This verse shows an interest in the detail of the sacrificial ritual which is foreign to Jeremiah.

27. Here we find an element of bathos which the genuine stinging words of Jeremiah avoid (the words of judgment are based on the refrain in Amos 1.3-2.5).

GOD'S PURPOSE OF GRACE REVEALED IN
THE POTTER'S HOUSE
18.1-12

This section seems to contain a genuine parable of the prophet (vv. 1-6a) and a later comment on it (vv. 6b-12) (cf. Mark 4.1-20). The fact that a new vision of God's truth comes to Jeremiah in such an everyday experience as seeing a potter turn his wheels is in harmony with his initial visions of an almond shoot and a boiling pot (1.11-16). And there is no doubt of the importance of what he sees. For he awakes to God's purpose of grace behind the impending disaster that is about to break upon Judah. God can do with his people what the potter does with a piece of pottery whose pattern has been spoilt in the making. God is not only sovereign Lord free to do what he wills, but he is patient and loving, and will not let them defeat his intention to make them a people for his own possession. (For other uses of the image of the potter see Isa. 29.16; 45.9; 64.8; Wisd. 15.7; Ecclus. 33.13;

Rom. 9.21.) The potter had two wheels one on top of the other tied to a common axis. The larger bottom one the potter worked with his foot: on the smaller top one as it turned he shaped his clay (cf. Eccles. 38.29 f.).

6b-10. To this creative insight of Jeremiah is added a prosaic piece of good theology, which is perfectly true, but has not the power to stir us to worship as Jeremiah's words have. God's dealing with humanity—any nation or kingdom—is always conditional. He responds both to a people's turning from evil to him and also to their turning from him to ways of disobedience.

11-12. The conclusion drawn is that God's purpose towards Judah is to bring evil upon her, and so Judah must turn to him and live differently. But the people resolve to continue their course of stubborn disobedience. It is important to realize that this is not the conclusion which Jeremiah drew, and which we also ought to draw from his experience in the potter's house. If at times we minimize to our own hurt God's hostility to sin, we also minimize to our own hurt God's enduring purpose of grace. And we may be heartened, as Jeremiah was, by the remaking of a spoiled bowl as it seemed good to the potter. So God can do with us and our world.

THE UNNATURALNESS OF ISRAEL'S
APOSTASY
18.13-17

It is a fundamental conviction with Jeremiah, as it must be for any one who truly believes in God, that disobedience to God is horribly unnatural. As he has said before (2.10 f., 32; 5.20-25; 8.7), Israel's disobedience goes against the custom of nations and the order of the natural world. The appeal to the custom of nations is, of course, not thorough-

going. They also are disobedient to the one true God, but they can and do remain faithful to their self-indulgent non-moral deities, whereas Israel's allegiance is a much more costly as it is also a much more transforming thing. But by comparison they are faithful whereas Israel is not. In relation to the order of the natural world Jeremiah adds to his illustration of the habits of birds (8.7) the permanence of snow on the tops of the mountains. DOES THE SNOW LEAVE THE CRAGS OF SIRION? DO THE MOUNTAIN WATERS RUN DRY, THE COLD FLOWING STREAMS (RSV)? SIRION is the Phoenician name for Mount Hermon, as Deut. 3.9 explains. The absence of snow on Mount Hermon is quite unthinkable.

15. But because Israel has found difficulty in following THE ANCIENT ROADS (cf. 6.16), the fundamental covenant between God and man, she has turned into pleasant BYPATHS where in fact she is bound to encounter much greater difficulty. Indeed, the unbelieving peoples, who have no desire themselves to serve God in true devotion, will yet be appalled at what has happened to God's people. They will be destroyed by a scorching wind from the desert. And worst of all, they will not have God's fellowship but his hostility. This is the thing that Jeremiah feared for himself (cf. 17.17); his ministry was devoted to seeing that it did not happen to his people.

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART
VII: THE PLOT AGAINST JEREMIAH AND
HIS PRAYER FOR VENGEANCE
18.18-23

This is the harshest of all Jeremiah's prayers for vengeance (cf. 11.20; 12.3; 15.15; 17.14-18). It presupposes a plot against Jeremiah's life similar to that of 11.18-12.6, but this time emanating from the religious leaders. They are specified as the priests who gave *torāh* (law, instruction), the wise men

who gave *etsāh* (counsel) and the prophets who gave *dābhār* (the word of God, revelation). Jeremiah had been unsparing in his criticism of all these groups (see 2.8; 4.9 f.; 6.13-15; 8.8 f.; 14.13 f.; 23.9-33; 26.1-9). The 'wise men', of whom we hear much after the exile, had already appeared as a separate group. They taught the youth of the nation both orally in public, and as individuals in private (cf. Job 29.7-28 and Eccles. 39.1-11).

18. This means, 'We are not going to stand any more his biting criticism which challenges our right to exist. We are going to attack him in return.' The last phrase means either 'Let us pay no attention to what he says in his own defence'; or, if we read, with the LXX, 'Let us listen to all his words', it means, 'Let us find something in what he says for which we can denounce him to the authorities.' (Cf. Mark 3.6; 12.13.)

19-20. Whether they are or are not going to pay attention to Jeremiah, Jeremiah wants God to do so. It is by God's paying attention to him that he lives. He asks an age-old question: IS EVIL A RECOMPENSE FOR GOOD? The answer is 'no', but those who practise goodness must not expect to receive the same in return, but must practise it unweariedly whatever harsh treatment they receive. Jeremiah feels the people's hostility the more keenly because he has interceded for them (cf. 15.11; 29.7).

21-23. These last verses are so harsh that some commentators have wanted to deny them to Jeremiah altogether. Here the horrible destruction of men and youths, wives and children which he had seen coming upon his beloved country are now directed against those who have DUG A PIT for his own life. Beyond that he takes his prayer for vengeance into the presence of God and asks that God shall be unrelenting in an implacable refusal to forgive, and deal with them in the full strength of his hostility to wrong-doing.

Poor Jeremiah! He has exposed his inner soul for all later

generations to see his anguish, his uncertainty, his compassion, his joy, his utter despair and his cry for vengeance. We need not think that the vindictive spirit which he shows here is more than a passing phase, even though the written word cannot be cancelled. Perhaps, after all, he did 'turn' to share the spirit of his opponents more than he ought (against 15.19). and when they said (17.15) 'Let it come' he said, 'I hope you get the full force of it.' Jeremiah did better than this, though it seems right to think that such a 'passionate outburst of vindictive fury' (A. S. Peake) may have been wrung out of him. It stands to us as a warning that those who are called by God to speak words of judgment in his name must keep them carefully under his control, lest they go beyond his purpose and spill over in ways that are only harmful. It also makes us come and stand at the feet of Christ, treating his words which rebuke Jeremiah (Matt. 5.44 f.; 6.12; Luke 23.34) not as normal human achievement, but as the fullest outpouring of divine grace into human life. Only in him can we learn, with the apostle, to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12.14-21).

THE SIGN OF THE BROKEN FLASK

19.1-2, 10, 11a, 14-15

Ch. 19 contains two elements which need to be separated out. One is a symbolic action told in the third person, probably by Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary (see the comment at 32.12), and probably fairly early in his ministry. The breaking of the earthenware flask, a highly expensive water decanter which could not be repaired, symbolizes and helps to bring about the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. The story is told here because of the story of the potter's house in ch. 18, though there is no intrinsic connection between the two incidents. Indeed, after all that we have learnt from Jeremiah at first hand, this learning from him at second hand is curiously

unilluminating, and we wonder what the story might have been if Jeremiah had told the same incident in his own words.

1. The senior priests

Literally 'the elders of the priests'; they are mentioned also at II Kings 19.2, but nothing is known of their standing.

2. The potter's house (18.1) was probably in the Hinnom Valley where water would be available.

the Potsherd Gate (RSV)

Usually thought to be identical with the Dung Gate of Neh. 2.13; 3.13, 14; 12.31.

15. they have stiffened their neck

Cf. Stephen's speech, Acts 7.51.

CHILD-SACRIFICE THE CAUSE OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM 19.3-9, 11b-13

The other element in ch. 19 is a denunciation of child sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom woven into the incident of the broken flask by the Deuteronomistic editor, no doubt because of the mention of the valley in v. 2. The substance of these verses has been given already in 7.29-34, and readers are referred to the comment there.

3. Cf. I Sam. 3.11; II Kings 21.12.

7. make void

This is a word-play on the word FLASK linking the two elements in the chapter.

8. This verse is borrowed from 18.16.

PASHHUR PUTS JEREMIAH IN THE STOCKS 20.1-6

This incident apparently follows the event of the sign of the broken flask and reflects the hostile official attitude to Jeremiah following on his temple sermon (see 26.1-24). Pashhur (not the same as the Pashhur in 21.1; 38.1), who was responsible for keeping order in the temple, probably had a similar position to that of the later 'captain of the temple' (Luke 22.52; Acts 4.1; 5.24). We do not know the precise nature of the stocks into which Jeremiah was put, but it did mean his lying in a cramped and uncomfortable position for most of a day and a whole night. Jeremiah's reply is to make Pashhur an instrument of the prophecy that he is seeking to suppress. He gives him a new name, 'TERROR ON EVERY SIDE', that comes out of his own preaching (cf. 6.25; 20.10; 46.5; 49.29) and he names the enemy who will inevitably produce that terror. Everywhere Pashhur goes everyone will know that Jeremiah has made him a symbol of the coming disaster, and that in two ways. He will be unable to prevent Babylon working its will on those who look to him to prevent it, and he himself will be carried off to Babylon for captivity and death. In putting Jeremiah in the stocks, Pashhur has PROPHESED FALSELY because he has sought to suppress the manifest will of God. (Many have compared the reply of Jeremiah to Pashhur with that of Amos to Amaziah at Bethel; see Amos 7.10-17.)

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART VIII: GOD'S COMPULSION AND JEREMIAH'S CONFIDENCE 20.7-10, 12, 11

The last two of Jeremiah's private disclosures (given in

20.7-18) obviously come from different situations. The first one itself has two parts—one dealing with Jeremiah's inability to run away from the necessity of proclaiming God's truth, and the other expressing Jeremiah's confidence in God's victorious presence with him.

12. If this verse (which is the same as 11.20) is in place here it should be read before v. 11, as otherwise it breaks the sense.

13. This is probably a liturgical comment in the margin which has crept into the text. There is nothing in the spirit of rejoicing which it shows to make us deny it to Jeremiah (cf. 15.16). But the impersonal phrase—THE LIFE OF THE NEEDY—removes it from the actual situation. Jeremiah would certainly have said: 'FOR HE HAS DELIVERED me.'

7-8. These verses express the conflict in Jeremiah's mind between the hostile jeering that comes from outside, and the doubts and uncertainties that are in his own heart. Within his relationship to God, which he never doubts, he turns on him and roundly denounces him as a liar (cf. 15.18). God has falsely coerced him. Every time he opens his mouth he preaches these prophecies of the destruction of his country, and this exposes him to hostility and ridicule. But when he says to himself, 'I can't stand it any longer. I'll never prophecy again,' then he cannot do it, because there is a fire within him that must find an outlet. God is the inescapable beginning of Jeremiah's life, and the experience of his call (1.5) is renewed under pressure. With this sense of inevitability compare Amos 3.8, 'The Lord God has spoken: who can but prophesy?' and St Paul in I Cor. 9.16, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.' In what he says Jeremiah combines the thought of God's word as FIRE (5.14) with the thought of his inability to HOLD IN the wrath of God (6.11). It was just this sense of the inescapability of God that made him 'a fortified wall of bronze' (15.20) that nothing could break.

10, 12, 11. In the second part of the 'Confession' the jeering and hostility are expressed and overcome by Jeremiah's confidence in God. (Read with RSV FOR I HEAR MANY WHISPERING. TERROR IS ON EVERY SIDE! 'DENOUNCE HIM! LET US DENOUNCE HIM!' SAY ALL MY FAMILIAR FRIENDS, WATCHING FOR MY FALL. The phrase TERROR IS ON EVERY SIDE is probably used in a jeering way by Jeremiah's friends, picking up a catchword of his (cf. 6.25; 20.3; 46.5; 49.29) and throwing it back at him in mockery. Part of the trial upon Jeremiah's spirit is that his opponents are all very well known to him (cf. 12.6) and he has the horrid sense that they are waiting for him to make a mistake (cf. 18.18). But he has the exultant confidence that, in point of fact, they are not going to succeed, because God is with him AS A DREAD WARRIOR. If God is fighting on his side, he need not be afraid of the numbers, animosity or power of those against him (cf. Ps. 27.1).

THE OUTPOURINGS OF JEREMIAH'S HEART
IX: JEREMIAH CURSES THE DAY IN WHICH
HE WAS BORN
20.14-18

It is unfortunate that the last of these intimate utterances of Jeremiah should be an expression of the lowest depths of despair which he ever reached, because in them it is clear that by means of self-security and self-criticism, and through a real wrestling with God, a new unshakable confidence was being born. But it is well that we should share with the prophet some of the cost of the prophetic office.

He curses the day that he was born. The messenger that brought the news of his birth should have been destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. Jeremiah should never have been allowed to live. Why was he? Why was he, when he sees nothing but evil and SORROW and spends his DAYS IN SHAME?

(Job 3.1-26 is a similar lament, probably based on this passage.)

The ancient thought about curses was that they were objectively effective apart from the intent of the utterer. It is, however, difficult not to think that this expression of his distress helped Jeremiah to accept the harsh situation in which he was placed, to transform it and even to rejoice in it. There is a sense in which it is true to say that he never had anything but TOIL AND SORROW and SHAME all his days. The last glimpse of him that we have is when he is dragged off unwillingly to Egypt by a people that will accept neither him nor his God (chs. 42-44). Yet in this he is not despairing nor defeated, but victorious and triumphant because in fellowship with God he has fought his worst terrors and overcome them. All he suffered made him turn even closer to God, and the toil and sorrow and shame he experienced were no discredit to him but only to the people who resisted his ministry.

BAD KINGS, LYING PROPHETS, AND GOOD EXILES

21.1-24.10

(Prophecies from the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah)

THE KINGS OF JUDAH

21.1-23.8

JEREMIAH'S ANSWER TO ZEDEKIAH'S
QUESTION: THE BABYLONIANS WILL
CONQUER JERUSALEM

21.1-7

The Deuteronomistic editor seems to have included 21.1-10 here in order to complete his collection of Jeremiah's pronouncements on the kings of Judah. It seems to be a less interesting duplicate of what we find elsewhere. The necessity of surrender to Babylon is taught in 27.1-11 and repeated in a message to Zedekiah in 27.12-15; Jeremiah's prophecy about Zedekiah's personal fate is given at 34.1-7 (of which 32.1-5 is a less interesting variant). What actually happened to him is told in 39.4-7 (and more fully in 52.7b-11 = II Kings 25.4-7). The confrontation between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah (597-587) in the years before the fall of Jerusalem is one of the most remarkable things the Book of Jeremiah has to show us. Two interviews between Jeremiah and Zedekiah are recorded for us in 37.3-10 and 38.14-28, and will be considered there in their historical setting. What we are given here is a second-

dary representation of Jeremiah's insistence on the necessity of accepting the fact that Babylon's conquering power cannot be resisted. (For Ezekiel's comment on King Zedekiah see Ezek. 17.11-21.) Two comments only need be made here.

5. It is clear that Jeremiah thought of Babylon as being used by God to punish Judah for her sins (cf. 27.6 and 43.10 where Nebuchadrezzar is called God's servant). Here the writer goes so far as to say that God himself would actually FIGHT AGAINST Judah—a thought that was easier to have after the event. For the Deuteronomic phrases cf. Deut. 4.34; 5.15.

7. In 13.14 it was said on the parable of the jars that God would not PITY OR SPARE OR HAVE COMPASSION. Here the same phrases are applied with greater appropriateness to Nebuchadrezzar. The Bible is always very clear-sighted about the pitilessness of warfare, even of ancient warfare.

JEREMIAH ADVISES THE PEOPLE TO
SURRENDER TO THE BABYLONIANS
21.8-10

This is the attitude Jeremiah came to have in the reign of Zedekiah in face of the approaching conquest by Babylon. It is given also in 38.2, 3, 17-23, where it may be studied in its historical setting. Here it is focused in terms of a choice between a way of life and a way of death (for which see Deut. 11.26 and 30.15).

9. shall have his life as a prize of war (RSV)

FOR A PREY (AV), i.e., an unexpected bounty on which he had no right to count (cf. 38.2; 39.18; 45.5).

UNLESS THE ROYAL HOUSE DOES JUSTLY
GOD WILL BURN THEM UP
21.11-12

Here we are back at an earlier stage in Jeremiah's ministry, where he is appealing to the palace for a concern for justice and deliverance from oppression as part of the moral stability of the nation. The absence of it will bring about the political disaster he dreads. The relation between moral integrity and political wisdom is complex but it is certainly real, and the absence of concern for moral integrity is a barrier to true worship.

DISASTER CANNOT COME NEAR US
21.13-14

This is a very obscure oracle. Apparently it is directed against Jerusalem, although the phrases INHABITANT OF THE VALLEY and ROCK OF THE PLAIN do not suit Jerusalem, and it is directed against the belief that because Jerusalem is God's city it cannot be taken.

THE KING MUST DO NO WRONG
22.1-5

This section, which picks up the thought of 21.11-12, and is a generalized statement of the prophetic attitude to the kings, probably does not come from Jeremiah himself, but from the Deuteronomistic editor. But it embodies the prophetic word which was brought to its climax in the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 6.33): 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things should be yours as well.' It is clear that, in those troublous times, for a king of Judah to keep steadfastly

faithful to the covenant God of Judah and to practise steadily JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS was no easy path to political success and a long life. The prophetic judgment goes beyond empirical evidence. In the end success on these terms is the only success worth having, and in the long run—though it may be the very long run—it is clear that these terms are necessary for human health and stability. The warning against injustice and oppression is couched in the strongest terms.

5. I swear by myself, says the Lord

Because God is God, wickedness cannot triumph. (The oath is given elsewhere at 49.13; 51.14; Gen. 22.16; Amos 6.8; Isa. 45.23; and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews weaves it into his argument, Heb. 6.13-18.)

THE KING'S PALACE WILL BE DESTROYED 22.6-7

Here is a poem of Jeremiah which is to be linked with the preceding verses and also with the judgment on Jehoiakim (vv. 13-15) for its understanding. The king's beautiful palace has in fact been built upon injustice and oppression. We have already met Gilead (8.22) as the source of balm, and Lebanon (18.14) for the permanence of its snow-covered peaks. Here they are the fertile area in which cedar trees flourished. (For the use of cedar in Solomon's temple and other buildings see I Kings 5.6, 8-10; 7.2-5; 10.27.) But the beautiful character of the palace will not save it from destruction.

BE WARNED BY THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM 22.8-9

This is a formal comment from a later time, accepting the

destruction of Jerusalem as the punishment of disobedience. See the comment on 5.18-19; 9.12-16 and 16.10-13.

JOSIAH AND JEHOAHAZ (SHALLUM) CONTRASTED 22.10-12

In vv. 10-19 we have Jeremiah's only comments on King Josiah. In both sections they come incidentally.

10. A brief poem on King Jehoahaz, whose private name was Shallum (I Chron. 3.15) and whose story is told in II Kings 23.29-35. After the death of Josiah (in 608 BC) the people put his son, Jehoahaz, on the throne, presumably to follow in his father's footsteps. But this was unacceptable to Egypt, and after a three months' reign he was deposed and taken off to exile in Egypt. His brother Eliakim, who took the name Jehoiakim, was appointed by the Pharaoh in his place (see vv. 13-19).

The poem was apparently spoken while the people were still mourning their beloved King Josiah. Its purpose was two-fold—to ask for more sympathy for this young man, given no chance to live his life before being dragged off to exile, than for a king who dies after long years (638-608) of distinguished service. There is here no disrespect for King Josiah (as is plain from vv. 13-19) but a recall to the present situation, to the pitiable fate of the young king, and perhaps, and this is the second thing, to warn the people that things may be very different for them in the future.

11-12. A prose explanation which was not necessary when the poem was first said, but which we are very glad to have.

JOSIAH AND JEHOIAKIM CONTRASTED 22.13-19

It was said earlier (see 21.1-7) that the confrontation between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah is one of the most remarkable things the Book of Jeremiah has to show us. The bitter conflict between Jeremiah and King Jehoiakim (608-597 BC) is also remarkable. We have seen (vv. 10-12) that his name was originally Eliakim, and that Egypt placed him on the throne and changed his name to Jehoiakim probably deliberately to suggest that Jehoiakim's policies were in fact the true following of Jahweh, the God of Judah. He was no doubt unlucky that in his reign, in 605 BC, occurred one of the decisive battles of the world at Carchemish, when Babylon overthrew the suzerainty of Egypt. With his background there was likely to be trouble with Babylon even though he did not live to see the full consequences of his policies. Apart from the numerous indirect references to him and other events in his reign, there are three other passages in which Jeremiah and Jehoiakim are clearly opposed. One is the account of the temple sermon and its consequences (ch. 26; cf. 7.1-15)—this includes the fact that Jehoiakim killed another prophet, Uriah; another is the summary of Jeremiah's preaching given in 25.1-14 which was probably part of the roll of Jeremiah's preaching read before King Jehoiakim, which he cut up and threw bit by bit into a brazier, an action which was ineffective because Jeremiah re-wrote it with additions (see ch. 36). God's word of warning and comfort to Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary (ch. 45)—see the comment on 32.12—belongs to this time, the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, after the critical battle of Carchemish had taken place.

It is against the background of a fundamental incompatibility of outlook and ambition between prophet and king that we must read Jeremiah's pronouncement of God's judgment on Jehoiakim. The judgment falls into four parts.

13-15a. The king is condemned for injustice and extravagance. He had carried through the extensions to the palace by means of forced labour without compensation. This is an offence against the love of neighbour which is fundamental to both Old Testament and New (cf. Lev. 19.18; Luke 10.25-37). He has made Jerusalem like Gilead and Lebanon (cf. v. 6), yet is ostentation the true mark of a king?

15b-16. Here Jeremiah contrasts him with his father, King Josiah. This in itself would not have disconcerted Jehoiakim, because he probably invited the contrast. Jeremiah says that Josiah ate and drank (cf. Matt. 11.19). He was no harsh ascetic; Martin Buber's suggestion of the holy covenant meal seems to read too much into the text.¹ But he fulfilled the Hebrew standard of justice by seeing that the poor and needy received fair treatment; and Jeremiah, following Hosea (6.6), identifies this with the knowledge of God. When we realize how central the knowledge of God was in Jeremiah's thinking (see esp. 8.7; 24.7; 31.31-34) this is very high praise indeed (cf. Ecclus. 49.1-3). Yet it is astonishing from our point of view that Jeremiah does not explicitly refer to his centralization of worship at Jerusalem, and it looks as if, whatever words and actions of Jeremiah come from the reign of Josiah, it was in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah that he had come to prophetic maturity and accepted responsibility for the life of the nation. But it is significant that Jeremiah is prepared to say of the old king, even to point a moral to Jehoiakim, that he was one who knew God.

17. Jeremiah returns to his indictment—which is now a charge of DISHONEST GAIN (RSV) and VIOLENCE. SHEDDING INNOCENT BLOOD may mean unjust judicial decisions or the persecution of innocent people (cf. the death of the prophet Uriah. 26.22 f.).

¹ *The Prophetic Faith*, p. 163.

18-19. What should the death of such an unworthy king be? Jeremiah thought he deserved the utmost dishonour—the exposure of his corpse without burial rites, just like an ass. It seems probable that this prophecy (which is repeated in 36.30) was not fulfilled. Jehoiakim died before the result of his policies could be brought home to him, and II Kings 24.6 says that he ‘slept with his fathers’.

GOD'S DISOBEDIENT CITY 22.20-23

This lament over Jerusalem was apparently spoken in 597 BC, after King Jehoiakim's death. The leaders of the people in Jerusalem had been carried captive to Babylon (see the following verses and II Kings 24.14-16). The city is bidden to GO UP on the mountains and mourn—to Lebanon in Syria on the north, to Bashan in upper Trans-Jordan on the north-east, and to the Abarim mountains (AV ‘the passages’) on the south-east (where Moses died, Num. 27.12; Deut. 32.48—Mount Nebo was probably the highest peak). Jerusalem had always been disobedient to God, says the prophet (contrast the obedience of Israel in the wilderness—2.2).

20. your lovers

Here the leaders who have been exiled; elsewhere (see 31.4.30) it means either false gods or foreign powers.

22. A play on words which the RSV translates, THE WIND SHALL SHEPHERD ALL YOUR SHEPHERDS. The wind which they despised (5.13) shall blow to their disadvantage, and their shepherds or lovers shall be seen to be no true rulers of God's people.

23. Jeremiah picks up the images of vv. 6 f. and looks ahead to the greater disaster which he thinks of once again in terms

of the image of child-birth (cf. 4.31; 6.24; 13.21). It is a pathetic lament over a dearly-loved yet disobedient city.

JEHOIACHIN WILL GO INTO EXILE 22.24-27

The references to King Jehoiachin in the Book of Jeremiah have already been discussed at 13.18 f.

24. Of the three poems which Jeremiah made about Jehoiachin, this verse (minus the explanatory phrase THE SON OF JEHOIAKIM, KING OF JUDAH) is the first. It expresses Jeremiah's conviction that Babylon would not let Jehoiachin remain on the throne. It may be that as with Jehoahaz (Shallum, vv. 10-12), so with Jehoiachin, it was a case of like father, like son, and as Egypt had acted in the first instance, so Babylon visited upon his luckless son the punishment they would have meted out to Jehoiakim if he had lived. But from Jeremiah's point of view it was God who was tearing Jehoiachin out of the kingdom of Judah.

24. Coniah

This shortened form of Jeconiah was Jehoiachin's private name (see also v. 28; 37.1; 29.2). For the fulfilment of the prophecy see II Kings 24.12-16. A SIGNET RING was used for making plain the genuineness of letters and documents and so was very valuable. Haggai applies the simile of a signet ring to Jehoiachin's grandson, Zerubbabel (2.23).

25-26. A prose explanatory comment by the editor.

27. A further comment, which does not belong to the initial poem, which was simply a prophecy of exile, but to vv. 28-30, and which correctly gives Jeremiah's undoubted conviction that the king and his mother would never return home.

JEHOIACHIN WILL NOT RETURN FROM
EXILE
22.28-30

28. This verse reflects the atmosphere of the agitation (see 28.1-4; 29.1-32) for the return of Jehoiachin from exile to replace Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, who had been placed on the throne. Whatever Jeremiah's criticisms of Zedekiah (cf. 37.18) he was kindly disposed towards him, and he was implacably opposed to the agitation as political folly and religious disobedience. The verse is in fact that spoken by Jehoiachin's party; they have begun to ask questions at last, but these are the wrong questions.

pot

This reading (RSV) is preferable to AV, IDOL.

29-30. Jeremiah's answer is a solemn affirmation, beginning with the threefold repetition of the word LAND (RSV) that no one of this family would ever sit on the throne of David again. Jehoiachin was, of course, not in fact childless. Verse 28 refers to his CHILDREN (RSV; AV, SEED). I Chron. 3.17-18 gives the names of his seven sons, and he is named in Matt. 1.11 f. as one of the ancestors of Jesus. In 1939 Babylonian tablets were published which showed the rations accorded to Jehoiachin and his children. But though Jehoiachin's grandson Zerubbabel was appointed governor in Judah in 520 BC (see I Esdras 4.47-57), it turned out to be true that, as Jeremiah said, NONE OF HIS OFFSPRING SHALL SUCCEED IN SITTING ON THE THRONE OF DAVID, AND RULING AGAIN IN JUDAH (RSV).

GOD WILL GIVE HIS PEOPLE GOOD RULERS
INSTEAD OF BAD
23.1-4

One of the characteristics of a prophet of God is that he

sees disaster where other people see peace, and also hope where other people see despair. We must be careful not to attribute to Jeremiah hopes which belong to a later time, but we must also be quite clear that in Jerusalem's darkest days he never lost hope in God or in God's purpose for the people and the land (cf. esp. ch. 32). In 23.1-8 we have three prophecies, all of which express some aspect of Jeremiah's thought of the future.

1-4. (Verse 3, with its reference to ALL THE COUNTRIES to which God has driven his people, may be an addition.) Probably from the time of Zedekiah, and spoken not so much against him as against the princes (37.15), of whom it is clear he was afraid, as he was afraid of others (38.19). God will punish them for the harm they have done to his flock and will give the REMNANT OF HIS FLOCK (cf. the name of Isaiah's son *Shear-jashub*, 'a remnant shall return', Isa. 7.3) true rulers who will nourish them as they ought to be nourished (cf. John 10.1-18; Luke 15.4).

THE TRUE KING OF ISRAEL
23.5-6

When King Jehoiachin was exiled, his uncle came to the throne and ruled for eleven years. His name was Mattaniah, and the King of Babylon changed it to Zedekiah, 'The Lord (Jahweh, the God of Judah) is my righteousness'. This was done for political reasons to associate the king publicly with the religion of Judah. One can imagine Jeremiah having to work closely with him for years, longing for a king who would in very fact act up to the name which Zedekiah bore. At any rate, this is the hope expressed in vv. 5-6, and this is the ideal which Jeremiah had of what a king should be. For a later commentary upon this hope see 33.14-26. For BRANCH, i.e., of the kingly tree, cf. Isa. 11.1, where a different Hebrew word

is used, and after Jeremiah Zech. 3.8; 6.12 (cf. also John 15.1-8).

THE RETURN FROM EXILE IS A GREATER
DELIVERANCE THAN EVEN THE EXODUS
ITSELF
23.7-8

These verses, which have already been found at 16.14 f. fall to be considered here, where they form part of the whole section 23.1-8 in which Jeremiah looks towards the future. Many commentators have considered that these verses cannot come from Jeremiah, on the ground that they presuppose the Exile, and that they are dependent on Isa. 43.16-21, which C. R. North has entitled 'The new and more wonderful Exodus'.¹ But it should be said that they are not in the idiom of Deutero-Isaiah but very definitely in a Jeremianic idiom, and that this is so remarkable an insight that there is every likelihood that it goes back to Jeremiah himself. As Artur Weiser says, these verses picture the marking out of a new epoch in salvation-history, and there is nothing in them which compels us to deny them to Jeremiah. Compare Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (31.31-34). Jeremiah, with all the weight of the disaster of 587 BC long foreseen on his mind and heart, perceived that in what was happening God was testing his people (9.7), and though punishment was alas! inevitable, yet through it his purpose of grace would be accomplished even more than through the Exodus. And if the insight is not that of Jeremiah, but comes from one of his disciples, it is still of great importance, and an important judgment for our understanding of the history of God's people.

¹ Isaiah 40-55 (Torch Bible Commentaries), 1952, p. 75.

GOD'S WORD ABOUT PROPHECY
23.9-40

In vv. 9-33 we have Jeremiah's collected oracles on prophecy (vv. 34-40 are a legalistic expansion of v. 33). See the comment already made on 14.13-16 and compare the judgment of other canonical prophets in Micah 3.5-12; Isa. 28.7-13; Ezek. 13.1-16. The collection was probably made by Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary (see the comment at 32.12). (In reading this section we should bear in mind particularly chs. 27-29, Jeremiah's conflict with nationalistic prophecy.)

THE WICKEDNESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE
23.9-12

This passage may come from Jeremiah's early poems, in which he is overwhelmed with horror at the sinfulness of the people (cf. 5.1-5, 30 f.). With the anguish of the prophet, cf. 4.19; 9.1, and with his sense of being drunk contrast Acts 2.15.

10. adulterers

This probably means here 'breakers of the covenant' as at 9.2. What hurts Jeremiah in both people and the prophets that lead them is that THEIR MIGHT IS NOT RIGHT, PROPHET AND PRIEST are again (cf. 2.8, 26; 4.9; 5.31; 6.13) together in the same condemnation, and again (cf. 6.16; 13.16; 18.15) Jeremiah uses the image of the wrong and untrustworthy roads; for SLIPPERY PATHS cf. Pss. 35.6; 73.8. Punishment for their wickedness is inevitable.

THE EVIL PROPHETS OF JERUSALEM
23.13-15

Jeremiah condemns the prophets of Samaria for prophesy-

ing by Baal. This is the worship of nature, the worship of a false god. But the prophets of Jerusalem are worse (cf. 5.30); they are false to the true God whom they profess to serve. THEY COMMIT ADULTERY (cf. 29.23) AND WALK IN LIES, their moral life is an affront to true worship, and the result is that NO ONE TURNS FROM HIS WICKEDNESS. It is this turning which, as we have seen (cf. 4.1; 15.19), is the deep concern of Jeremiah, and apart from the endeavour to bring it about there can be no true prophecy. So they will drink POISONED WATER (cf. 8.14; 9.15). Because they are contaminated their source of supply will be still further contaminated.

THE FALSE PROPHETS HAVE NOT STOOD IN
GOD'S COUNCIL: THEY DO NOT
UNDERSTAND GOD'S DETERMINATION TO
PUNISH THE WICKED
23.16-22

Jeremiah's two deepest convictions about prophecy are expressed in this poem. One of these is that the prophet must stand in a personal relation with God, and the other is that the prophecy must be such as to exercise a morally transforming effect. Neither of these conditions can be applied by rule of thumb, but every prophet must be challenged as to whether he possesses them.

Jeremiah insists that the prophets whom he opposes are not speaking God's word but their own word. They would, of course, have challenged that (cf. ch. 28, and compare Shemaiah's counter-accusation that Jeremiah is a 'madman who prophesies', 29.26). But Jeremiah goes on to say that they tell those who need moral transformation not to worry (again see ch. 28). While there may still be room here for differences of judgment as to what the situation actually is, it is clear that any prophecy that leaves out God's claim for obedience and love must be condemned.

Furthermore, he asks the question, to which he expects the answer 'No one', WHO AMONG THEM HAS STOOD IN THE COUNCIL (Hebrew *Sōdh*) OF THE LORD? The Hebrews believed in the existence of a council or assembly of supernatural beings, over which Jahweh their God presided. Cf. Amos 3.7; Pss. 82.1; 89.7; I Kings 22.19-22 (Micaiah); Job 1-2; 15.8; Isa. 6; Eccles. 24.2; and compare the use of the same word for other groups, e.g. 6.11 'gatherings' (RSV); 15.17 'company' (RSV); in both cases AV has 'assembly'. Jeremiah believed that a true prophet was able to listen in to what was being discussed at such a council as the false prophet was not. Wheeler Robinson has said, 'Such a view as this in no way deprives the prophet of that direct relation to God which we can see at its highest in the dialogues of Jeremiah with Him. . . . It was possible, for the prophet who believed himself to be a true member of the heavenly group, to speak freely in the name of Him whose will said the last word, but whose decisions were also those of the heavenly council.'¹ Only by standing in God's council could any prophet hear God's word.

19-20. These verses are thought by many scholars to be an intrusion here, and it is clear that we could read on from v. 18 to v. 21 without them. But other scholars think that they testify to the content of the word which Jeremiah heard in God's council. Jeremiah would have approved of the later word of St Anselm: 'You have not yet considered of how great a weight sin is,' and with the impending doom of Judah weighing on his mind all through his prophetic ministry, he thinks that those who prophesy easy things understand neither God's word nor the world in which they live. God did not send them, Jeremiah declares (v. 21). If they had had this personal relation to God, then their word would also have had transforming power.

¹ *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, 1946, pp. 169 f.

GOD IS OMNISCIENT AND OMNIPRESENT
23.23-24

Jeremiah insists that God is not merely a localized deity whose power and whose vision are limited, but the God of the whole universe who sees everything. If the prophets take that God seriously they must know whether or not they have heard his word and know that all that they think or do is open to him (cf. 16.16 f.; Amos 9.2-4; II Sam. 14.20; Ps. 138.6; 139.7-12).

NO DREAM CAN BE COMPARED WITH
THE WORD OF GOD
23.25-29

Out of his burning sense of the certainty and power of the word of God that had come to him, however hardly won, Jeremiah distinguishes sharply between such a word which is LIKE FIRE, LIKE A HAMMER breaking a rock in pieces, and like genuine WHEAT, and the dreams of the false prophets which he characterizes as LIES, as things that cause people to FORGET God, and as mere chaff. Such an affirmation may have been true, but Jeremiah does not establish it—he only gives expression to his vivid conviction that it is so. Dreams had been thought to be a legitimate means of divine revelation (see Num. 12.6; I Sam. 28.6; Joel 2.28; Zech. 1.7-6.8, and for illustrations cf. Gen. 37 and 41). To condemn a dream as a form is as unsatisfactory as the way Karl Barth in the thirties used to condemn the phrase 'it seems to me' as necessarily ruling out any true obedience to God's word.

27. In Hebrew fashion Jeremiah speaks of the outcome of THE DREAMS WHICH THEY TELL ONE ANOTHER as if it were their purpose.

29. On the power of the word cf. Heb. 4.12 f. But we remember that Jeremiah, who speaks here of the power of the word, once thought that it was a lie (20.7), knew its apparent ineffectiveness (5.12; 17.5) found that King Jehoiakim called it into question (36.23-26, 29), and in the last recorded utterance of his (44.15-23) discovered that the women (and their husbands) rejected it in favour of the worship of the Queen of Heaven which had prevailed under Manasseh.

GOD IS AGAINST THE LYING PROPHETS
23.30-32

In so far as the prophets are in fact false prophets, the conclusion inexorably follows that God is against them. The only new thought is that they STEAL God's WORDS FROM ONE ANOTHER. They make use of current prophetic language without, of course, understanding its inner meaning, and debase it.

32. Do not profit

This, for once, is an understatement.

THE WORD OF THE LORD IS NOT A BURDEN
TO THE PEOPLE BUT THEY ARE A BURDEN
TO HIM
23.33

Read with RSV YOU SHALL SAY TO THEM, 'YOU ARE THE BURDEN, AND I WILL CAST YOU OFF, SAYS THE LORD.' This saying of Jeremiah depends upon a play on the Hebrew word *massa*, which means both an oracle, a word from God, and a burden. When people ask, 'WHAT IS THE *massa*?' in the one sense, Jeremiah is to say, 'YOU ARE THE *massa*,' in the other sense. God has borne the burden of his people carefully

and lovingly for long (cf. Ex. 19.4; Deut. 1.31; 32.11; Isa. 46.3; 63.9; Hos. 11.3) but now it has become oppressive and he is going to cast his people into exile.

NO ONE MUST USE THE TERM 'BURDEN'
FOR GOD'S 'WORD' OR GREAT DISASTER
WILL COME UPON THEM
23.34-40

The previous verse became unintelligible to some readers. And a faithful but unintelligent person, standing in the tradition of Jeremiah, evolved the idea that Jeremiah meant that the term *massa'* was utterly offensive. Provided you did not use the term, you could say exactly the same thing; but if the people used the term *massa'*, then God would forget and cast off and shame his people. This legalistic pedantry has nothing to do with the mind of Jeremiah or with any true religion.

THE VISION OF THE TWO BASKETS OF FIGS 24.1-10

This vision of Jeremiah's dates from the important period between 597 and 587 B.C. King Jehoiachin and the leaders of the people have been taken into exile, and the greater disaster of 587 is still to come. See the comment on 13.18 f., and for the historical background see II Kings 24.10-17. With the form of the vision compare 1.11-19; Amos 7.7-9; 8.1-3. It is clear from Ezek. 11 that many of those left behind in Jerusalem were complacent about themselves, and said of the exiles, 'They have gone far from the Lord; to us this land is given for a possession' (Ezek. 11.15).

The genuineness of the vision has been disputed on the ground that it contradicts what we know of Jeremiah's thought

—his earlier conviction that all Jerusalem is sinful (5.1-6), his condemnation of King Jehoiachin (22.24-30), his critical attitude to the exiles in ch. 29, his lenient attitude to King Zedekiah (chs. 37-38), and his own personal decision, after the fall of Jerusalem, not to go to Babylonia (39.13 f.; 40.1-6). But this criticism misses the mark by treating the vision as a total and permanent judgment on both groups, whereas it is a comment upon the new possibility that has been opened up. Instead of being 'far from the Lord', as the people in Jerusalem thought according to Ezekiel, the exiles are now liberated from the dread destiny which still hangs over those remaining in Judah; though far from the temple, they are freed from false trust in it (7.1-15; 26); and if they TURN TO GOD WITH THEIR WHOLE HEART (v. 7), then they will KNOW God and be his PEOPLE in a sense that was not possible while they still remained in Jerusalem. God is greater than all the means of grace, and in Babylon his arm is not shortened that he cannot save, nor his power weakened so that he cannot make his presence known. In one sense the vision is a rebuke to the complacency of those left in Jerusalem; in another sense it is a vision of hope, first for the exiles, and thereafter as a permanent possession of the people of God.

At the same time it is clear that there is a progressive decline in moral standards in the kind of action that takes place before the three deportations whose numbers are mentioned in 52.28-30. Before the first, King Jehoiakim in cynical disregard of Jeremiah burnt his scroll of prophecies (36.20-28); before the second, the solemn pledge to slaves given by King Zedekiah and his people under the impact of the siege was broken when the siege was lifted (34.8-22); before the third, Gedaliah, appointed Governor of Judah by the Babylonians, was wantonly assassinated (41.1-18).

The fig harvest in Judah began at the end of June. The combination of figs and the temple is made in Jeremiah's own mind to bring out the new understanding that had come to him.

6. I will bring them back to this land

That is, eventually, though not immediately (compare ch. 29).

8. Those who dwell in the land of Egypt

These are those who had been exiled with King Jehoiachaz (cf. 22.10-12), or those who, favouring Egypt rather than Babylon, had voluntarily taken up residence there.

9-10. Cf. 15.4; 29.18; 42.18; 44.12. The destruction of the kingdom still hangs as a threat over Jerusalem.

SUMMARY OF JEREMIAH'S PREACHING 25.1-14

In these verses we have Jeremiah's summary of his own preaching dictated to Baruch and written in a scroll read to King Jehoiakim, destroyed by him and rewritten as we read in ch. 36. The time is 605 BC. The decisive defeat of Egypt by Babylon at Carchemish has taken place, and both Jeremiah and Jehoiachim know where they stand. The account as we have it shows traces both of the first and of the second scroll, and has also been worked over to link it with the introduction to the prophecies against the nations which follows.

1. The reference to the beginning of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar is probably an addition here. Other synchronizations are given at 32.1; 52.12; II Kings 24.12; 25.8.

3a. This is the dating which we have found previously at 1.1

3b, 4. These verses seem to be additions. They refer to other prophets, and while Jeremiah was not slow to confess his indebtedness to and solidarity with them (cf. 28.8), it is his own prophecies that he is summarizing.

9. Nebuchadnezzar my servant

The words MY SERVANT make an awkward construction in Hebrew, and are not in place. The thought, however, comes from Jeremiah himself, and is found at 27.6; 43.10.

the nations round about

These words are probably an addition. While it is clear that Jeremiah knew that the supremacy of Babylon would bring disaster to many nations (cf. v. 15), here he is concentrating on Judah.

10. The first part of this verse is to be found also at 7.34; 16.9; 33.11. Jeremiah has added here the familiar pleasant sound of the working of the hand-mill, and the LIGHT OF THE LAMP, as signs of the life that will be taken away.

11. these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years

Read instead with LXX, 'They' (i.e., the people of Judah) 'shall serve among the nations seventy years.'

12. Jeremiah looked ahead to think that the same process which brought Babylon as judgment upon many nations would at length overtake Babylon itself. It is implied in Jeremiah's conviction that the exiles would return (29.10), and in the prophecy that he caused Seraiah to cast into the Euphrates in the reign of Zedekiah (51.59-64). Yet Jeremiah was no theorist but essentially rooted in the claims of practical obedience, and his wider vision was never far from its repercussion upon present knowledge of the will of God. The elaborate denunciation of Babylon in ch. 50-51 comes from a later time, when the fall of Babylon, which took place in 539, was at least near. Verse 12, at least in its phrasing, also comes from that later period.

everlasting (RSV)

PERPETUAL (AV). This is a little extravagant.

13. this book

This originally meant 'this scroll' of Jeremiah's prophecies. With the addition later of the phrase WHICH JEREMIAH UTTERED AGAINST ALL THE NATIONS, it means the Book of Jeremiah as we have it, including ch. 46-51. The phrase was the title to the prophecies against the nations which in the LXX stand between v. 13 and v. 15 (v. 14 is omitted and is a later editorial expression). When the chapters were moved to their present position in the Massoretic text, a similar title was added there (46.1).

When these excisions are made, the summary of Jeremiah's preaching amounts to saying, 'God's call to repentance has been unheeded. Babylon is now the agent of God's punishment.' Even this is to be understood as an appeal to repentance—the acceptance of Jeremiah's outlook would have transformed the whole religious and political outlook. But in neither aspect in their close interrelation was Jehoiakim one with Jeremiah.

Two main questions need to be answered. Did Jeremiah actually mention BABYLON at this time? And the answer seems to be, 'Yes, he did.' He had the insight to realize the decisive character of Carchemish, and to see in Babylon the enemy from the north whom he had been expecting for so long.

Did Jeremiah prophecy an exile of SEVENTY YEARS? Again the answer seems to be, 'Yes, he did.' He meant it not as a precise prediction, but as a long term of two or three generations (cf. 27.7), or perhaps as the total length of a long-lived life (Ps. 90.10). He meant it as a warning of the serious character of the coming disaster, not as a word of comfort. But such a statement, once uttered, becomes a counter which people use without regard to its original intention and sometimes to the hurt of themselves and other people. The prophecy influenced Zech. 1.12; 7.5; II Chron. 36.21; Ezra 1.1; Dan. 9.2. Of Daniel, E. W. Heaton says, 'The writer's use of Jeremiah set a fateful precedent, but he himself did not fall into

the trivialities his example encouraged.¹ It is possible that this prophecy is part of the hardening of Jeremiah's attitude after Jehoiakim's rejection.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS 25.15-38

As we have seen, this section formed in the LXX an epilogue to the detailed prophecies against particular nations which we have in chs. 46-51. While it is more suitable as an introduction than as an epilogue, the placing of the prophecies against the nations at this point is probably original, and to do so would bring the structure of the book more into line with Isa. 1-39 and Ezekiel.

JEREMIAH'S VISION OF THE CUP OF GOD'S WRATH 25.15-16

Jeremiah sees the coming to power of a new world-dominating figure as occasioning widespread ruthless political conquest. And he sees it as the expression of God's hostility to political un wisdom and religious unworthiness. It is a grim and horrible image, and it expressed for Jeremiah a grim and horrible fact from which his soul shrank. And yet it insists that the most overwhelming human disaster does not take place apart from the presence and power of God. This does not answer the question whether the image is a good image, because the question how God is present and how God is acting in the oppressive situation arises for our reflection, and some answer needs to be given (cf. the comment on v. 30).

¹ *The Book of Daniel* (Torch Bible Commentaries), 1956, p. 203. Cf. his exposition of the prophecy of Jeremiah, pp. 204-5.

We have to hold up against Jeremiah his own standards of prophecy (23.16-22), and ask whether this generalized prophecy comes from the presence of God and whether in fact it has a morally transforming effect. We must ask whether when he takes the apparently simple but really complex thought of God's punishment of Judah for its sin, and applies it to a wider group of nations, he does more than describe the appalling possibilities of widespread disaster, whether he does in fact illuminate the relation of the nations to God or their relations to one another (see the comment at 46.1).

The image has, of course, been widely influential. The Cup is presented in the Bible either as a symbol of God's blessing (see Pss. 16.5; 23.5; Luke 22.17, 20; Mark 14.23 f.; I Cor. 10.16; 11.24 f.) or as a symbol of God's wrath (see 49.12; 51.7, Hab. 2.16; Zech. 12.2; Ezek. 23.33; Isa. 51.17, 22; Lam. 4.21; Pss. 11.6; 75.8; Rev. 14.10; 16.19; 18.6; Mark 10.39; 14.36; John 18.11). Note that, in the New Testament, while the Book of Revelation applies Jeremiah's image without much alteration in a very different setting, Jesus transforms it into an image of the costliness of his redemptive mission, which includes bearing in his own spirit the sense of the divine judgment on sin.¹

THE LIST OF THE NATIONS WHO ARE
TO DRINK IT
25.17-26

The most illuminating explanation of the presence of this list here is that it was put in as some compensation for the removal of ch. 46-51. It roughly covers the ground of the nations mentioned in those chapters. There is no mention of Damascus (49.23-27), and there are additions.

¹ See Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, 1952, p. 554.

18. as at this day

This obviously presupposes a later addition.

20. The LXX omits Uz, the land of Job (Job 1.1) near Edom, which is not the subject of a specific prophecy.

22. Tyre and Sidon are mentioned only briefly at 47.4.

23-24. The only elements from these verses that receive specific treatment are those dealing with Arab tribes in the prophecy against Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor in 49.28-33.

24. Arabia and . . . the mixed tribes

These mean the same thing.

25. Elam is mentioned in 49.34-39, and the Medes in 51.11, 28. Zimri is not mentioned again, and is omitted by LXX.

26. Babylon is a later addition to the nations against whom Jeremiah prophesied an immediately impending doom, though not of course to a list covering chs. 46-51. It is given here (and at 51.41) in the Hebrew in the form *Sheshach*—derived from Babylon by the cipher known as *athbash*—the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet stands for the last letter and *vice versa*, and so on through the alphabet. As the cipher is not used consistently it does not seem to have been dangerous to mention Babylon openly; it may have been used because the writer liked mysterious phrases and perhaps with a suggestion of humiliation.

IF GOD'S PEOPLE ARE PUNISHED THEN
OTHERS CANNOT ESCAPE PUNISHMENT
25.27-31, 33

27-29. In these verses the image of the cup of the wrath of God is pressed home, and an explanation given of it. (Cf.

48.26 f., and even more extremely 49.12 f.). If destruction is to come upon God's people, then of course the nations round about, who, by implication, deserve it much more, will not be able to escape it. This is understandable nationalism: but it contradicts the prophetic tradition from Amos onwards (cf. Amos. 1.1-2.16) and is clearly not the mind of Jeremiah, who felt so deeply the sin of his own people (cf. 2.9-13; 4.1-4).

30-31. These verses may most profitably be regarded as an expression in poetic form of the same sentiments as those in vv. 27-29. Cf. also Amos 1.2; Joel 3.16; Lam. 1.15; Isa. 63.1-6.

30. shout, like those who tread grapes

The juice of the grapes is of course the blood of the peoples flowing from the wine press. For this horrible image see especially Isa. 63.1-6 and Rev. 14.19-20; 19.5. The image is horrible, not because it dares to relate the holocaust of nations to the living God and takes account of the appalling suffering that it entails, but because it does not discriminate the way in which God is related to the holocaust. This, of course, is part of the problem of disentangling for later ages the different strands in prophetic thinking, and is equally raised by v. 31, *THE WICKED HE WILL PUT TO THE SWORD*. (See comment on vv. 15-16.)

33. A borrowing of the ideas of 8.2b; 12.12; and 16.4, about the devastation that will ensue.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE KINGS OF THE NATIONS 25.32, 34-38

In these verses Jeremiah expresses the kind of judgment he has earlier expressed about Judah (see especially chs. 2-6) as

referring now to the nations round about Judah. Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon are *A GREAT TEMPEST* coming from afar (cf. 23.19 and 6.22) or like *A LION THAT HAS LEFT HIS COVERT* and is seeking prey (cf. 4.7). This is going to mean disaster for the rulers of the nations—and Jeremiah drives this home by his threefold use of the word *SHEPHERDS*. It is good to think that Jeremiah not only said this—he brought it home to those rulers in practical advice (27.1-11).

PART TWO
THE LIFE OF JEREMIAH

26.1-45.5

Chs. 26 to 45 come mainly from the life of Jeremiah written by Baruch his secretary, who has not so far been mentioned. (See the comment at 32.12.) Incidents in the first part of the book may also come from his pen (see e.g. 19.1-15), but in these chapters he is our main authority.

JEREMIAH'S TEMPLE SERMON 26.1-24

THE PREACHING OF THE SERMON 26.1-6

We have been given in 7.1-15 a better account of the sermon than we are given here. Baruch is concerned mainly with the circumstances in which the sermon was delivered and what happened afterwards. He dates it at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (see 22.13-19). It may have been in 608. By this time Jeremiah is perfectly sure what his public witness should be. The content of the sermon is simply that unless they will TURN FROM their EVIL WAY God will make the temple LIKE SHILOH and Jerusalem an example for a CURSE. (For Shiloh see the comment on 7.1-15.)

6. a curse

This means that they will use Jerusalem as a horrid example (cf. 29.20-23), 'May you become like Jerusalem,' as it is promised, in the opposite sense, that men will use Abraham as a blessed example (Gen. 12.3). At least it is clear that Jeremiah proclaimed God's hostility to the temple and to the city.

JEREMIAH IN DANGER OF DEATH 26.7-19

The reaction to the sermon has five elements.

7-9. First THE PRIESTS AND THE PROPHETS AND ALL THE PEOPLE LAID HOLD OF Jeremiah. The priests and the prophets have good cause to know Jeremiah's condemnation of them (cf. e.g. 5.31) and their influence over the people is immediately dominant.

10-11. Next the princes try the case. The prosecution asks for sentence of death, because Jeremiah has denied that Jerusalem is unconquerable (see the comment on 7.1-15).

11. The princes of Judah

Not members of the royal family, but officials of the court, concerned with affairs of state. They are mentioned by name in 36.12. When these (or some of them) were taken into captivity in 597, others were appointed in their place, and we have a different group of princes in 37.15-38.1.

12-15. Thirdly, the trial. Before the princes trying the case, Jeremiah makes a quiet, humble and resolute defence. What he has said is God's word to them. They must change their way of life and obey God. They must do to Jeremiah what they think right, but if they kill him they will be killing an innocent man. (With v. 15 cf. Josh. 2.19; Matt. 27.24 f.; Acts 5.28.) If the account is right Jeremiah shows no fear (cf. 1.8, 17; 15.20) but equally he shows no desire for vengeance such as he poured out before God (11.20; 12.3; 15.15; 17.18; 20.12). His concern is for the vindication of his cause rather than for his personal well-being.

16. Fourthly, the verdict is given—the people abandoning the prophets and priests and joining themselves with the judgment of the princes. Jeremiah HAS SPOKEN IN THE NAME OF . . . GOD.

17-19. Finally a precedent is brought forward by the elders. The prophet Micah had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem a century previously (Micah 3.12), and King Hezekiah had not only not put him to death but had brought about reforms because of his prophecy (II Kings 18.3-6). (Cf. also 28.8.) To put Jeremiah to death would be very wrong. (We may note that, although the prophets influenced one another, the quotation from one prophetic book in another is most unusual.)

URIAH THE PROPHET PUT TO DEATH 26.20-23

At this point, and not as a continuation of the speech of the elders, Baruch tells the story of how in the reign of Jehoiakim another prophet, Uriah, whose message was similar to that of Jeremiah, was not so lucky. True, he fled to Egypt, whereas Jeremiah stood his ground, but it was necessary even for Jeremiah to take evasive action against Jehoiakim (36.19, 26). Egypt was the wrong place for Uriah to seek refuge, and Jehoiakim had him brought back and killed.

22. Elnathan, who had a hand in this, was one of those who urged Jehoiakim not to burn Jeremiah's scroll (36.25). Though later tradition saw the relation of Jerusalem to the prophets in terms of guilt (see Matt. 23.29-31; Luke 11.42-51) the only record in the Old Testament, apart from this, of the killing of a prophet is the story of the stoning of Zechariah in II Chron. 24.20-22.

JEREMIAH UNDER THE PROTECTION OF AHIKAM 26.24

The final verse of this chapter is a warning against placing Jeremiah in too drastic a separation from the rest of the community (see 16.5-9), or of taking with prosaic literalness his absolute condemnations (cf. 5.1-5). There were those who responded to Jeremiah, who supported and encouraged him, and who transmitted his teaching.

Among these, Ahikam and his family were important. Ahikam had been a political official—a prince—under King Josiah (II Kings 22.12, 14); his brother Elasa was one of

those who took Jeremiah's letters to the exiles (29.3); in the temple apartments of another brother, Gemariah, Baruch read to the people the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies (36.10); and it was Ahikam's gifted and attractive but too unsuspicious son, Gedaliah, who, when Jerusalem fell, was appointed by Babylon Governor of Judah (39.14; 40.13-41.3; II Kings 25.22). Indeed the attitude of respect, friendship and concern shown by all the political officials at the time of King Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies (see 36.14-19, 25) is very remarkable.

We must of course include Baruch, Jeremiah's able and devoted secretary (see 32.12, ch. 36) among his friends; we must remember also those who hid Jeremiah and Baruch away from the anger of King Jehoiakim (36.26); the friendliness of the high priest Zephaniah in the reign of King Zedekiah (29.24-32) and the courage and compassion of the Ethiopian palace chamberlain during the siege of Jerusalem (38.7-13).

Truly, Jeremiah was blest in his friends. His affection, so manifest in his poems, did not fail to find those who responded to it.

**JEREMIAH, IN OPPOSITION TO
NATIONALISTIC PROPHECY, INSISTS
THAT BABYLON'S CONQUERING POWER
BELONGS TO THE PURPOSE OF GOD
27.1-29.32**

These chapters also come from the pen of Baruch, with some harking back to Jeremiah's own prophecies. There are three peculiarities of style which they share in contrast with the rest of the book. (1) Whereas the Babylonian King is called elsewhere, rightly, Nebuchadrezzar, in these chapters he is Nebuchadnezzar. (2) Names compounded with the name of the God of Judah end in Hebrew in *Jah* instead of as elsewhere *Jahu*. (3) Jeremiah is commonly referred to as 'Jeremiah the

prophet' (so too Hananiah). At one time these three chapters must have formed a little booklet on their own.

**JEREMIAH WARNS THE ENVOYS OF THE NATIONS
ROUND ABOUT THAT THEY MUST SERVE
BABYLON
27.1-11**

This is Jeremiah's most important action towards the nations round about—Edom (cf. 49.7-22), Moab (cf. 48.1-47), Ammon (cf. 49.1-6) and Tyre and Sidon (cf. 47.4). It took place in the fourth year of the reign of King Zedekiah—593 (see 28.1, LXX, which reads 'In the fourth year of Zedekiah, King of Judah, in the fifth month'): the name Jehoiakim in the AV of 27.1 is a mistake for Zedekiah. In a combination of political wisdom and religious loyalty, he warned the nations not to revolt against Babylon, as he persistently warned Zedekiah (21.7-10; 32.2-5; 34.2-5; 37.7-10; 38.17-23). The small nations in the area of Syria and Palestine constantly rebelled against their overlord in Mesopotamia but rarely succeeded. Wisdom for them lay in not taking sides and living as quietly as possible. Apparently Jeremiah's advice was heeded for the time being.

2. Jeremiah symbolizes subjection by the wearing of a yoke, which had a wooden YOKE-BAR (RSV) with leather THONGS (RSV) which held it in place.

4-11. His message is: God the Creator gives the earth to whom he thinks right (vv. 4-5); he has given it to Nebuchadrezzar his servant (v. 6); all the nations shall serve Babylon for three generations until that land is subjected in its turn (v. 7); the nation that will not serve Babylon will be punished (v. 8); do not listen to the false prophets (vv. 9-10); those who submit will live in peace in their own land (v. 11).

We may note the thought of God giving political power to those who rule (cf. John 19.10 f.): we have to express the relation between God and political supremacy in a more complex way, but we must not lose the conviction that God is the Lord of human history. Both here and in 43.10 Nebuchadnezzar is called God's SERVANT (cf. the later thought of Cyrus, King of Persia, as God's anointed, Isa. 45.1). It does not mean that he was a believer in the true God, but that God was using him for his own purposes in his control of human history.

JEREMIAH OPPOSES NATIONALISTIC PROPHECY:
HE WARNS BOTH THE KING AND THE PRIESTS
NOT TO REVOLT AGAINST BABYLON
27.12-22

12-15. The warning given to Zedekiah, which he was too weak to accept as a firm policy, is a shortened form of vv. 1-11. Submit to the King of Babylon (v. 12); the alternative is destruction (v. 13). Do not listen to the false prophets (vv. 14-15).

16-22. We have already seen (22.28-30) that after the deportation in 597 of King Jehoiachin and his princes there was a strong feeling that their exile could not last. Jeremiah was against this (see also ch. 29), no doubt feeling that the more they fed themselves with illusory hopes the more passionate would be their desire for revenge when hope no longer persisted. One aspect of this was the conviction of the priests that the taking from the temple of all its finest ornaments was an outrage, and that these must come back. Jeremiah insists that agitation against Babylon on this point can only provoke greater destruction still. If the priests really care about their work of intercession then let them pray earnestly that the temple may not be ruthlessly stripped of the temple ornaments which still remain.

Though this warning is addressed to THE PRIESTS (and the people) it is part of Jeremiah's opposition to nationalistic prophecy: the expectation that the exiles will speedily return has no justification whatever.

16. vessels

This word, used in both RSV and AV, is translation English. J. P. Hyatt suggests the colourless word 'objects';¹ R. A. Knox paraphrases as 'sacred treasures'; John Skinner calls them 'utensils';² and this is one aspect of the meaning, though it hardly does justice to the element of display; perhaps 'ornaments' comes near what we want. The provision of these treasures is described in full in 1 Kings 7.15-50; the Babylonians took the best of them for their metal in 597; for the fact that there were quite a number left, and that (by implication) their pillaging was a matter of great distress, see 52.17-23=II Kings 25.13-17.

16-22. These verses have suffered some expansion, especially in vv. 19-22, and in particular the promise in v. 22 that God will eventually BRING the ornaments BACK is out of keeping both with the historic situation and with the mind of Jeremiah.

HANANIAH AND JEREMIAH:
A CONFLICT IN PROPHETIC UNDERSTANDING
28.1-17

This chapter is really a continuation of 27.1-11. It is a conflict between the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah as to whether Jeremiah was right in wearing a yoke (27.2; 28.10) as a symbol that subjection to Babylon was necessary. It illustrates the difficulty of applying even Jeremiah's deepest convictions (23.22) in a neutral way. The truth of prophecy can

¹ *The Interpreter's Bible* 5, p. 1013.

² *Kings* (The Century Bible), 1904, pp. 135 f.

only be apprehended through personal commitment. As we read this story we must restrain our prejudice in favour of Jeremiah, and our knowledge that Hananiah was in fact wrong. No doubt Hananiah did not have behind him that searching wrestling with God and that morally transforming encounter that we have seen in Jeremiah: but it is quite clear that he was perfectly sincere, and that, *at the time*, people might have been hard put to it to decide who was right.

1-4. First we have Hananiah's own prophecy. He believed that within two years God would bring back the ornaments of the temple, restore King Jehoiachin and those who had gone into exile with him, and so break the yoke of Babylon.

5-9. Jeremiah's reply is curiously gentle. He first says 'AMEN!' to Hananiah's prophecy. He too loves his country, and if what Hananiah has prophesied does actually come true then he, Jeremiah, can only rejoice. But he says to Hananiah, as one prophet to another (cf. *YOU AND ME*, v. 8): 'Remember that the tradition in which we stand is one that tells of harsh things to come (cf. 26.18). Of course, good things may also come, but we must not take them for granted till they happen. (Modern readers should bear in mind Jeremiah's sense of impending disaster from the beginning of his prophetic ministry—the situation in which we stand determines what can rightly be said, and situations differ. Also Jeremiah is quite certain that to evade the moral requirement is to be false; cf. 23.22.)

10-12. Then Hananiah expressed his own prophecy in symbolic action, and Jeremiah *WENT HIS WAY*. Later, after the fall of Jerusalem and the murder of Gedaliah, when Jeremiah was asked whether the people should remain in Judah or not, it took him ten days before he was sure what God wanted him to say. Though the challenge of Hananiah was an issue with which Jeremiah had long been familiar, it is a tribute, both to Hananiah's sincerity of conviction and to Jeremiah's reflective

honesty of mind, that Jeremiah made no immediate answer, but went away to think about it.

13-15. The word of God when it comes is harsh and implacable. God will make not a wooden yoke but an *IRON YOKE OF SERVITUDE TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR*. Revolt against him must be completely ruled out as impossible. Hananiah has made people trust in something that does not come from God and is fundamentally untrue.

16-17. So, concludes Jeremiah, Hananiah must die this very year. And in fact, two months later Hananiah did die. Jeremiah's definiteness in repudiating Hananiah's prophecy was necessary to his effort to turn the thoughts of his people from the wrong direction. The fact that Hananiah did die no doubt helped to make his own policy immediately successful. Yet his insistence that Hananiah must die strikes us as being akin to his prayers for vengeance (11.20; 12.3; 15.15; 17.18; 20.12). Reflections upon the cause of Hananiah's death, perhaps attributing it to fear or guilt, are purely speculative. The death of Hananiah in no way proved the truth of Jeremiah's contentions, and, indeed, when the effect had worn off, Zedekiah did revolt against Babylon (II Kings 24.20-25.1; Jer. 37.1-5).

JEREMIAH'S TWO LETTERS TO THE EXILES IN BABYLON 29.1-32

This chapter is linked with the two previous ones by belonging to the time between the deportation of 597 and the fall of Jerusalem in 587. It is rather earlier than ch. 27-28. It comes from Baruch's life of Jeremiah with some additions.

1-23. The first letter was sent not only to *THE PRIESTS, THE PROPHETS AND THE PEOPLE*, but also to *THE ELDERS*, who

played an important part in the ordering of the exilic community (see Ezek. 8.1; 14.1; 20.1), though we do not know exactly what they did.

2. An editorial intrusion to explain v. 1. Jeconiah is of course Jehoiachin (see 22.24).

3. The letter was sent by . . . Elasah

We have already noticed him as the brother of Ahikam (26.24).

and Gemariah

He was probably the son of Josiah's high priest (II Kings 22). (Evidently not all the princes of Jehoiachin had been taken away captive.) Elasah and Gemariah went on one of the missions to Babylon to assure Nebuchadrezzar of Hezekiah's loyalty.

4-7. Jeremiah's message to the exiles is to tell them to settle down in Babylon and to FIND their WELFARE (AV PEACE) in the welfare of Babylon. They are to BUILD, they are to PLANT, they are to rear families, increasing the strength of God's people, and they are to PRAY for the WELFARE of Babylon. This is the disclosure of a remarkable new facet in Jeremiah's mind. In spite of his prayers for vengeance, he has himself prayed for those who hated him (15.11; 18.20), and he reaches out to claim a foreign hostile power as the object of prayer. Even though the well-being of the exiles was bound up with the welfare of Babylon, this is in part a reaching forward to that later word 'Love your enemies' (Matt. 5.43-48).

8-9. If these verses are in place here, then the dreams (cf. 23.28) which Jeremiah has in mind are prophecies of a speedy return to Palestine such as Hananiah proclaimed (28.3 f.). These are not to be believed.

10-14a. But though the captivity will be long (SEVENTY YEARS, cf. 25.11), God's purposes toward his people in exile are to bless and not to hurt, and he will give them A FUTURE AND A HOPE (AV, AN EXPECTED END). In their corporate life together they WILL PRAY to Jahweh, the God of Judah, the living God, and he WILL HEAR and bless. Though the circumstances are entirely strange and very difficult, if they want to find God they will find him (cf. Deut. 4.29, which is dependent upon this insight of Jeremiah's). This emphasis upon the inner meaning of worship is not to be thought of as individualistic or as 'lay-religion' opposed to the cult. It does mean, however, that apart from the wealth and resources of the temple, God's people can worship him with true devotion and real blessing in a foreign land. And this is a far-reaching conviction. The second part of v. 14 about God gathering them FROM ALL THE NATIONS is a later expansion.

16-19. These verses, which take up and expand 24.8-10, have been inserted into Jeremiah's letter by a later hand. Evidently the person who did this felt that Jeremiah's judgment would not be complete unless it included the fact that upon those who remained in Jerusalem a greater doom still was impending. But here the verses are quite out of place.

15, 20-23. The last part of the letter is to call attention as a warning to the awful fate of the two prophets in Babylon, Ahab and Zedekiah, who have been burnt alive (cf. Dan. 3.6). Ahab and Zedekiah have given their names to the worst possible curse that men can utter. No doubt it was on account of their political agitation that Babylon acted, but Jeremiah calls attention to the immorality of their lives and to the falsity of their teaching.

24-32. Jeremiah's letter to the exiles was not received without protest. Shemaiah (whom otherwise we do not know) wrote to Zephaniah the high priest: 'You are in charge of

every mad prophet and you should have put Jeremiah in the stocks (cf. 20.1-6; contrast 23.28 f.). He has actually told us to settle down to a long exile in Babylon.' But Zephaniah, when he received the letter, read it to Jeremiah. Jeremiah had had his friends even in the difficult days of King Jehoiakim (cf. 26.24). Because of his courage and faithfulness the number may well have increased in the reign of Zedekiah in spite of the increased hostility to him (38.4). Jeremiah's answer to Shemaiah's letter is to prophesy that no descendant of Shemaiah will live to see the restoration. This again is a harsh word comparable to Jeremiah's treatment of Hananiah (28.16 f.). How close together in Jeremiah are the things which reveal his enlarging of human vision and the things in which he is no more than a child of his time! Yet the truth was with Jeremiah and not with Shemaiah.

JEREMIAH AND THE FUTURE

30.1-33.26

These four chapters are grouped together here as containing the outlook of Jeremiah on the future. They contain some important material—poems of hope for the northern kingdom (31.2-6, 15-22); the prophecy of a new covenant (31.31-34) and Jeremiah's symbolic act of hope in God's purpose for Judah by buying a field at Anathoth (32.6-15)—but also much that is secondary. The chapters break the biographical narrative of Baruch, though they are linked to it by the incident of ch. 32. Chs. 30-31 form together a 'book of comfort' which originally circulated as a separate roll, just as chs. 27-29 did, and also the book of prophecies of judgment (see ch. 36). They were then added to chs. 1-25, 46-51, to form together Jeremiah's prophecies. They have been placed here to link on with the note of hope in 29.32, and ch. 32 has been wrenched out of its true place between chs. 37 and 38 to belong with them. Ch. 33, which consists of meditations on Jeremianic themes, has been added because of similarity of subject matter. It is wrong to think of these chapters as supplying the only elements of hope that are to be found in Jeremiah. The harshness of the situation in which he found himself impressed itself on all his words and actions, but through it all there shows not only a rich and generous humanity, but a persistent hopefulness (see 2.1-3; 7.34; 9.23 f.; 12.7; 15.16; 17.7 f.; 18.1-6a; 23.1-8; 24.1-10; 28.6; 29.4-14). Scholars are divided about the interpretation of chs. 30-31, though it is generally admitted that ch. 31 contains the more valuable material. But the attempt of Rudolph to show that 30.1-31.22 forms a consistent unified prophecy of hope for the northern kingdom falls before the irremovable impression of the mosaic-like char-

acter of ch. 30. There is a division of opinion too about the time in which the poems of hope which the chapters contain were spoken. Skinner attributed them to the period of perhaps five years (cf. 52.29 f.) when Gedaliah was Governor of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem, but the majority of scholars seem to attribute them to the earliest period of Jeremiah's ministry (cf. 3.6-18).

THE MOSAIC OF CHAPTER 30 30.1-31.1

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF COMFORT (30.1-31.40) 30.1-4

This is the editor's introduction to the two chapters. He sees their theme as being the restoration of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

JACOB'S TIME OF DISTRESS 30.5-7

Whether the last phrase belonged to it or not, this poem may well be from Jeremiah. It employs his persistent image of the pains of childbirth (cf. 4.31; 6.24; 13.21; 22.23; 49.24; 50.43) as a symbol of the coming distress. Since Amos the DAY of the Lord meant judgment (see Amos 5.18, 20; 8.9; Isa. 2.6-22; Micah 1.2-5; Zeph. 1.7-18; Joel 1.15; 2.11; 3.14). Jeremiah will have had in mind some specific historic situation.

THE BREAKING OF THE FOREIGN YOKE 30.8-9

This is a prose statement that foreign oppression will be taken away and that they will be free to serve God and their king from the house of David. These verses seem to be dependent on Isa. 10.27; Hos. 3.5; Ezek. 34.23. They raise no moral demand, but merely the question 'when'? If they come from Jeremiah, they need expansion to disclose their meaning.

JACOB SHALL RETURN 30.10-11

These verses occur again at 46.27 f. Verse 10 is reminiscent of Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa. 41.8-10, 13, 14; 43.1, 5; 44.1, 2) and v. 11 borrows phrases already used in Jeremiah (1.8, 19; 4.27; 5.10, 18; 10.24; 25.29), not very intelligently. The insistence on NOT MAKING A FULL END in 4.27; 5.10, 18 is a mitigation of the prophet's prediction of absolute destruction (meant to lead to a new encounter with God) because it did not actually happen. Here the gloss is taken one stage further by insisting that God WILL MAKE A FULL END OF ALL THE OTHER NATIONS, which is both absurd and untrue to Jeremiah. At the same time the thought that because God is with Jacob NONE SHALL MAKE HIM AFRAID is precious in the total thought of the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 17.2; Micah 4.4; Zeph. 3.13; Ezek. 34.28; 39.26; Lev. 26.6; Job 11.19).

THE HURT OF GOD'S PEOPLE IS INCURABLE 30.12-15

These verses may well come from Jeremiah. They are the kind of thing that he might well have said during the siege

of Jerusalem. They are a plea that God's people should recognize that the disaster that has come upon them is no sign that God has forgotten them, but rather that he takes his obligations to them very seriously. There is no easy way out of the situation that confronts them. They must accept it and go through with it and not expect God to cure it. Their own religious disloyalty and political unwisdom have brought it upon themselves. The verses are included here in order that they may be counteracted in the next verses.

14. Lovers

Here 'political allies' (cf. 4.30).

THOSE WHO DEVOUR YOU SHALL BE
DEVoured
30.16-17

What Judah has suffered others must suffer too, for two reasons: because they have done this hurt to God's people, and because they have jeered at Jerusalem as ZION, FOR WHOM NO ONE CARES (RSV). These are not Jeremiah's reasons, they are the reasons of an offended nationalism.

THE RESTORATION OF THE FORTUNES OF
JACOB
30.18-22

Much of this one would like to attribute to Jeremiah. OUT OF THEM SHALL COME SONGS OF THANKSGIVING AND THE VOICES OF THEM THAT MAKE MERRY seems to fit his happier mood. But the poem as a whole reflects a later situation.

20. The people are no longer a kingdom but a religious CONGREGATION ('*edhah*)—the word regularly used by the priestly writers (see Ex. 12.3; Lev. 4.13; Num. 1.2 etc.).

21. They have had experience of being ruled by men of another nation and now want to rule themselves. But the king will not only be a king, he will be a priest with the right of access to God. Read with RSV, WHO WOULD DARE OF HIMSELF TO APPROACH ME? (Cf. Num. 16.5; Lev. 21.21,23; Ezek. 44.13.)

22. This verse with its emphasis on the covenantal relationship is not in place here; it is probably inserted here because of 31.1. The thought is fundamental to Jeremiah (7.23; 11.4; 24.7; 31.33).

GOD'S DETERMINATION TO PUNISH THE
WICKED
30.23-24

These verses we have met before at 23.19 f. They express Jeremiah's mind about the doom that comes from human wickedness. As with vv. 5-7 and 12-15 they are given here as a foil to the promises of restoration.

GOD WILL CLAIM ISRAEL AS HIS OWN
31.1

This verse belongs to both chapters, giving the word of comfort in face of the tempest of God's anger, yet looking forward to the poem that follows. The thought of God's covenant is fundamental to Jeremiah (cf. 11.1-14), though for him it was the presupposition of God's anger, not its alternative.

JEREMIAH'S POEMS IN CHAPTER 31

31.2-6, 15-20, 21-22

GOD'S RENEWING LOVE FOR ISRAEL

31.2-6

In this beautiful poem Jeremiah (following Hosea. cf. Hos. 11.1-9) founds everything on God's EVERLASTING LOVE and his FAITHFULNESS (*chesed*—elsewhere translated by 'steadfast love') and shows his natural delight in human enjoyment (cf. 7.34). He looks back again to the WILDERNESS period after the Exodus when Israel lived by God's GRACE and knew God's revelation on Mount Sinai. The covenant there established was a covenant of God's everlasting love which God has maintained with steadfast faithfulness. Nothing in Jeremiah's words or deeds should make us think that he ever went back upon this conviction. So he sees the building of the waste cities, the cultivation of the soil, the enjoyment of life and its culmination in worship. This is Jeremiah's picture of hope for his people.

4. Virgin

'Unsullied', cf. v. 21 and 14.17; 18.13; 46.11; see the comment on 14.17.

5-6. The mention of Samaria and Ephraim implies that the poem was originally written for the northern kingdom.

THERE IS HOPE FOR THE CHILDREN OF

RACHEL

31.15-20

Once again, Jeremiah, in a poem of great beauty, gives

God's answer to the distress of the northern kingdom. Rachel was the ancestress of the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the sons of Joseph) and of Benjamin. Her tomb was at Ramah, five miles north of Jerusalem (see Gen. 35.16-20; 48.7; I Sam. 10.2) though because of confusion between Ephrath and Ephrathah and the application (with slender justification) of v. 15 to Herod's massacre of the innocents (Matt. 2.18) it was traditionally placed five miles south of Jerusalem. Rachel is pictured as weeping for her children who have been taken from her into exile.

16-17. The prophet in God's name promises that they will return. He then pictures Ephraim expressing true penitence for his wrong doing (cf. 3.21-25).

18. bring me back that I may be restored (RSV)

This is one of the possible meanings of the Hebrew: 'Cause me to turn, and I will turn.' The deeper meaning is 'Cause me to turn to thee'—this is the fundamental turning which concerned Jeremiah (cf. 4.1-2); 'and I will turn to thee' or 'return to my country'—both of them lesser turnings from Jeremiah's point of view.

19. Here there is a fourth turning—the disastrous turning away from God.

was instructed

This may mean 'became submissive'.

smote upon my thigh

The RSV, which has suppressed other physical expressions of mental states (cf. 4.19), retains this one, which is not intelligible in English; read 'I was filled with grief and despair'. Ephraim became ASHAMED of his past sinning.

20. In response Jeremiah paints a picture of the Father's heart

yearning over prodigal Ephraim (cf. Luke 15.11-24). God cannot be other than merciful to his wayward people. We must not contrast this moving utterance with Jeremiah's poems of destruction. We do these wrong unless we see them as part of the strategy of God's mercy.

RETURN HOME 31.21-22

The final poem in this group is an appeal to the northern exiles to come back to their native land. Apparently the political conditions make it possible. The only thing that is hindering it is the uncertainty of the exiles themselves. The second part of v. 22 might be seen as a climax of Jeremiah's appeal if we knew what it meant, but we do not. Neither RSV A WOMAN PROTECTS A MAN nor AV A WOMAN SHALL COMPASS A MAN nor any other conjecture really explains what is the NEW THING which God has done which calls for new action on their part.

These poems of hope, though beautiful and moving, were not justified so far as the northern kingdom was concerned. What would Jeremiah have said about this? I think he would have said that it was a true word of God to call attention to God's everlasting love which cannot be finally defeated. As Jeremiah himself sought ever new opportunities of hope (cf. chs. 24, 29, 32), so God, if his purposes are not fulfilled in one way, will seek other ways of fulfilling them. And he would also have called attention to God's demand for true repentance, plain in vv. 18, 19 and especially in v. 22. It was the failure of human response which defeated these hopes for the future.

JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY OF A NEW COVENANT 31.31-34

This prophecy by Jeremiah is self-contained. There is nothing to show when he said it—though the profundity of his vision makes it clear that it is the fruit of experience. The precise wording is clumsy and may be due to another hand (the words AND THE HOUSE OF JUDAH are unnecessary because they are covered by the phrase THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL, the repetition MY COVENANT is intrusive, and of the four instances of SAYS THE LORD two could be eliminated with profit). But the genuineness of the prophecy is unmistakable because it sums up and carries forward one important aspect of Jeremiah's teaching. Following Hosea, who came near to anticipating his vision (Hos. 2.19 f.) and who stressed the knowledge of God (Hos. 4.1, 6; 5.4; 6.6), Jeremiah found that the absence of a knowledge of God was the source of all that was wrong (8.7) and the presence of a knowledge of God was the source of all blessedness (24.7). (See the comment on 2.4-13.) When Jeremiah examined the institutions and offices in his people whose only purpose was to lead them to the knowledge of God, he found them wanting; when he turned back from his public questioning to the security of his own heart, he found there too a resistance, uncertainty and anguish which had to be overcome. Both the public and the private aspects of Jeremiah's ministry led him, therefore, to the urgent need for the knowledge of God to be real in a new and quite unprecedented way.

31. Behold the days are coming

This is an eschatological phrase, and this is an eschatological prophecy which can only be fulfilled in the final Kingdom of God. We must remember this in relation to the New Testament.

covenant

See the comment on 11.1-8. Note that the new covenant, like the old, is with Israel. It is a corporate covenant. Jeremiah does not set in opposition the corporate and the individual aspects of faith.

32. not like the covenant

This does not mean that the Mosaic covenant is being repudiated. It has been broken by the sin of God's people, but it remains in force because God loves his people with an everlasting love and continues his faithfulness to them (31.3). The disjunction in Hebrew idiom is fluid in meaning and expresses comparison as well as alternatives. The new covenant in Christ when it came superseded the Mosaic covenant, transcending it and yet carrying it forward. It was a new covenant also in the sense in which Jeremiah thought of the deliverance from exile (23.7-8).

33. Jeremiah has spoken much of how stubbornly wicked the human heart is (3.17; 7.24; 9.14; 11.8; 13.10; 16.12; 18.12; 23.17); he has insisted on how untrustworthy it is (4.14; 5.23; 17.9). For him sin is engraven on it (17.1). So he knows that nothing external to the human heart can do what is necessary to conquer man's lack of trust and obedience. The knowledge of God must become even more intimate in human life than sin. To the outward basis of the covenant which rests on God's redemption must correspond the inward response of the human heart.

34. This does not mean an individualistic religion in which each man is self-contained in relation to God. It is within the covenant with Israel. It means that the experience of the true prophet of standing within the council of God and listening to him (23.18) will be the experience of every Israelite, and that no one will have to teach any one else what this first-hand experience of God means, because it will be the basis

of their life. And this first-hand experience of God will come from a full and true response to God's forgiveness.

With this prophecy compare Ezekiel's teaching about a new heart (Ezek. 11.19; 18.31; 36.26) and John 3.7, 'You must be born anew.'

The impact of this prophecy upon the New Testament is far-reaching. First of all there is the Pauline tradition of the Last Supper, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood' (I Cor. 11.25; cf. Luke 22.20), which we may confidently ascribe to the mind of Jesus himself. The new covenant which Jesus brought about in his life, death and resurrection was new in two senses. First, in a sense not in Jeremiah's prophecy, it was new because it was the covenant of greater deliverance than the Exodus or the Exile, the deliverance of man from sin and death, and made not with Israel but with the Church, which is in character universal. Secondly the new covenant was new in being a new covenant of the knowledge of God, in which the first-hand knowledge of God available to prophets in the old dispensation becomes available to any one who will give himself in trust to God in Christ Jesus. Here is wonderful fulfilment for Jeremiah's prophecy. Yet only in part. No one can or need do anything more than Jesus has already done in making available the knowledge of God to men—yet the prophecy is an eschatological prophecy, the very work of Jesus also needs fulfilment, the Church of Christ is not as full of the knowledge of God as it ought to be, and so within the fulfilment of Jeremiah's new covenant in Christ we reach forward to that perfect fulfilment, when the knowledge of God will be written on every human heart, in God's final Kingdom.

The fulfilment of the new covenant in Christ is emphasized by St Paul, for whom all the promises of God find their 'Yes' in Christ (II Cor. 1.20), and for whom, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation (II Cor. 5.17)—a letter written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (II Cor. 3.3).

Of lesser importance is the use of Jeremiah's prophecy in

the Letter to the Hebrews, where, however, it is quoted twice; once in full (8.8-12) and once in part (10.16 f.). The writer uses the prophecy, not to bring out its deep inner meaning, but in support of his technical argument, first, that the old covenant must have been imperfect, and second that there is no need for further offering for sin. Yet the quotations themselves have served to call attention within the New Testament to the greatness of Jeremiah's prophecy.

SECONDARY MATERIAL IN CHAPTER 31 31.7-14, 23-30, 35-40

THE GATHERING OF SCATTERED ISRAEL 31.7-14

This is a beautiful poem about the return from exile, though it does not seem to be from Jeremiah.

7. The poem begins with exultation and praise; THE LORD HAS SAVED HIS PEOPLE (RSV).

for the chiefs of the nations

Read instead 'on the tops of the mountains' (cf. Isa. 42.11)

8-9. God's tender care for his distressed people. Our inheritance in the Old Testament of this sense of God being on the side of those who are not able to look after themselves is very precious.

for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn

It is probable that this comes from Jeremiah, and it would

be appropriate to read it after the great expression of God's fatherly love for Ephraim in v. 20.

10-11. God's redemption of Jacob must be proclaimed far and wide.

12-13. His people will rejoice abundantly both in him and over the good things of life.

14. I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance

Though this verse also belongs to this picture, it is worth noting how far is the phrase just quoted from the mind of Jeremiah. It means that sacrifices will be so abundant in the new life that is opening before them that the priests will have plenty to eat.

For the language used in this poem cf. Isa. 35.5-10; 40.4, 11; 41.1, 18; 42.10, 16; 43.6, 20; 44.23; 45.2; 48.20 f.; 49.10, 24 f.; 58.11.

JERUSALEM AND JUDAH SHALL BE RESTORED 31.23-25

To prophecies of the return of the northern kingdom has been added this one referring to Jerusalem and Judah. The writer is interested both in Jerusalem itself and in the countryside. He is very far from the mind of Jeremiah in thinking that Jerusalem can be addressed as a HABITATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, a HOLY HILL. (For the phrases cf. 50.7; Isa. 1.26; 61.3; Zech. 8.3.) It is a mistake to confuse the ideal with the actual.

COMMENT BY A READER: A PLEASANT DREAM 31.26

This is a refreshing marginal note which has crept into the

text. Someone has commented: 'How nice it would be if this were so in real life!'

GOD WILL PLANT WHERE HE HAS
PULLED UP
31.27-28

This is an adaptation of Jeremiah's call (1.10) to the situation after the fall of Jerusalem. Both Israel and Judah needed to be re-peopled and re-stocked. Though it probably does not come from Jeremiah, this is a legitimate development, to express a word of hope when it will serve the purpose of necessary encouragement and moral incentive.

INDIVIDUAL INSTEAD OF COLLECTIVE
RETRIBUTION
31.29-30

The ancient world believed in collective retribution (see Num. 16.27-35; Josh. 7.22-26; I Sam. 22.16-19; II Sam. 3.26-30; 21.1-9). Jeremiah too believed in it (cf. 11.22 f.; 20.6; 29.32). It was a great step forward in human living when it was accepted as a normal principle of criminal law that there should not be corporate punishment for individual crime (see Deut. 24.16). Ezekiel fought the conception expressed in the proverb quoted in v. 29 and endeavoured to show that there was no truth in it at all (see Ezek. 14.13-20; 18). This passage presupposes that discussion. It sets the principle of individual responsibility as something that will be accepted in the future.

29. in those days

Obviously a different context from v. 31.

Whatever services Jeremiah rendered to personal com-

munion with God, this passage is alien to his mind and not in his idiom. It is the association of a contention of Ezekiel with the tradition of Jeremiah. It should be noted that, however beneficial v. 30 may have been in the sphere of criminal law, neither verse is a satisfactory doctrine of personal life in community.

ISRAEL'S FUTURE IS AS CERTAIN AS
THE ORDER OF NATURE
31.35-37

Ideas similar to those expressed in these verses occur also at 33.20, 25. It must be said that while one of the distinctive features of Jeremiah's thought is his use of the order of nature (see 5.22; 8.7; 18.14), he uses it to contrast it with the way God's people behave. Here the order of nature is used in a contrary sense, to give security and confidence to Israel. It is unlikely that Jeremiah would have approved. (For the conception of the created world cf. Isa. 40.12, 26; 42.5; 44.24; 45.7, 18; 54.10.)

JERUSALEM SHALL BE REBUILT
31.38-40

The last word in the 'book of comfort' (chs. 30, 31) comes from someone who was interested in the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem on a larger plan. He names the four corners, of which we know only THE TOWER OF HANANEL on the north-east (cf. Neh. 3.1; 12.39; Zech. 14.10) and THE CORNER GATE (cf. II Kings 14.13; II Chron. 26.9) on the north-west.

40. valley

Because the word used here is unusual, there is some disagreement among scholars as to whether it refers to the Valley

of Hinnom (see 7.29-34); if it does, it means that all the filthy associations of the people will be blotted out in the rebuilding.

the brook Kidron

This runs through the valley between Jerusalem and the mount of Olives (see II Sam. 15.23; John 18.1).

the Horse Gate

This was on the south-east.

for ever

The writer took the view that the city, once rebuilt, would be inviolate. He forgot the conditions that Jeremiah himself would have attached.

AFTER THE RESUMED SIEGE OF JERUSALEM, JEREMIAH BUYS A FIELD AT ANATHOTH, AS A SIGN OF GOD'S PURPOSE OF GOOD TOWARDS THE LAND OF JUDAH

32.1-44

This chapter contains a very important incident in Jeremiah's life told in prose by Jeremiah himself (vv. 6-15). This is a clear witness to Jeremiah's confidence in the future of his own land, and it is his testimony to God's purpose to bless it in the days ahead. It is a sign of hope when others were despairing. It is set in an inaccurate setting and has received a long explanatory addition that elucidates the obvious. But in itself the incident is very important for our understanding

THE SETTING: JEREMIAH A PRISONER DURING THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM 32.1-5

1-2. These verses place the incident in its right perspective. It is the year 588. The siege of Jerusalem, which began in Zedekiah's ninth year and will continue till his eleventh year (39.1-2), is in progress. The events of ch. 37 have already taken place. Jeremiah has been put in prison (37.5) and, after his request to the king, has been allowed the easier conditions of the court of the guard (37.21) to which people came and where business could be transacted freely.

3. Here, however, the editor attributes the imprisonment of Jeremiah to King Zedekiah, whereas it is clear that it was the princes, fanatically bent on hostility to Babylon, who were responsible (37.15).

4-5. The prophecy against Zedekiah comes from Jeremiah, but it is not in place here (cf. 34.2-5).

5. visit

This verse illustrates the ambiguity of the Hebrew word. Does it mean 'visit to bless', and if so it is an unfulfilled prophecy (as 34.5), or is the editor confusing Zedekiah with Jehoiachin (see 52.31-34), or is it 'visit in a hostile sense', and does it mean Zedekiah's death (cf. Num. 16.29)? It is uncertain.

UNDER THE CONSTRAINT OF GOD JEREMIAH BUYS THE FIELD FROM HIS COUSIN HANAMEL AS A SIGN OF CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF JUDAH 32.6-15

No doubt the conditions of siege had made things difficult

for Hanamel, and he needs to sell the property so that he can have the money. He comes to Jeremiah to know if he will buy the property to save it from going out of the family. The law about the redemption of land is given in Lev. 25.25-28. Strictly speaking Jeremiah is not buying it back, but the principle is the same. Jeremiah must have been thinking about Hanamel's situation and wondering what Hanamel would do. When he came to ask Jeremiah, then Jeremiah KNEW as he had known about the almond shoot (1.11-12) and the boiling pot (1.13-16) and the clay under the potter's hand (18.1-4) THAT THIS WAS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

9. Seventeen shekels

This meant seven ounces of silver, but we cannot estimate its value.

10-12. The purchase obviously took place in public IN THE COURT OF THE GUARD with many witnesses. This is the only account we have of such a purchase. Apparently the deed was written twice on a single sheet of papyrus, with one copy sealed up and the other left open so that it could be read. Pottery jars were very effective as strong places for documents. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1948 in such jars has made us vividly aware of this.

12. We note that the person whom Jeremiah instructs to take charge of the deed and to be responsible for its presentation is called Baruch. His father and grandfather are named. He was evidently a man of some standing. His brother Seraiah we learn from 51.59, was Zedekiah's quartermaster (A 'quiet prince'). Baruch's important relationship of trust and service to Jeremiah is additional evidence (cf. 26.24) that there were many ties linking Jeremiah to the community. This is the first mention of Baruch in the text of Jeremiah, though we have been forced to mention him before in the commentary. He has kept himself very largely out of the record. Ch. 36-

the story of Baruch writing the roll of Jeremiah's prophecies, their burning by King Jehoiakim, and Baruch's rewriting of the prophecies in fuller fashion—is Baruch's great moment. For the inner side of it we have God's word to Baruch in ch. 45. Apart from these references all we have is the complaint by those left in Judah that Baruch has had too much influence on Jeremiah (in 43.3) and the fact that Baruch was taken off with Jeremiah to Egypt (43.6). But we have a clear enough picture of Baruch's devoted services to Jeremiah.

15. The account ends with God's word, 'HOUSES AND FIELDS AND VINEYARDS SHALL AGAIN BE BOUGHT IN THIS LAND.' In this everything is summed up. God's purpose of blessing and Jeremiah's hope and confidence are unmistakably conveyed in word as in act.

A LATER EXPANSION 32.16-44

But someone later thought that the obvious needed elucidation and that it could be done by means of a prayer and an answer from God. Most of both are irrelevant to Jeremiah's situation, and where relevant they tell us nothing that we do not know from vv.6-15. Jeremiah could not have been so lacking in perception.

16-25. The prayer put in the mouth of Jeremiah is not necessarily unworthy because it does not come from Jeremiah. This one has often been compared with the prayer in Neh. 9.6-38. It contains the outline of a theology.

17-19. *The greatness of God.* God the Creator is mighty: NOTHING IS TOO HARD for him. He, WHOSE NAME IS THE LORD OF HOSTS, shows his STEADFAST LOVE TO THOUSANDS, but brings retribution for the guilt of fathers upon the children. He sees what every man does and gives him what he deserves.

20-23a. *The deliverance of the Exodus.* This mighty God wrought the great deliverance of the Exodus, and gave his people A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY.

23b. *The sin of man.* But they did not obey, so God has made this evil come upon them.

24-25. *The practical perplexity.* The conquest of the city which God had threatened is now taking place, and yet God has told Jeremiah to buy the land publicly.

This prayer is far removed from the simple directness of Jeremiah's prayers (cf. 11.20; 12.1-3; 15.15-18; 17.14-18; 18.19-23; 20.7-10, 12), yet it is not without proper liturgical structure. It is interesting to see that the two sides of the intrusion in the style of Ezekiel of 31.29 f. about individual and collective retribution are left side by side unresolved and uncoordinated in vv. 18 f. It is difficult to take seriously the query of vv. 24 f. since it is already answered in v. 15.

26-44. God's answer to the prayer is a more rambling recapitulation of what is taken to be Jeremiah's theology, though at the crucial point (v. 40) this is repudiated, before the obvious answer is given (v. 43) and before specifying in a prosaic way all the districts where fields will be bought again (cf. 17.26 in the late insertion 17.19-27, and 33.13).

27. Nothing is TOO HARD for God.

28-29. God is giving Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar who will destroy it and its idolatrous houses.

30-35. Israel and Judah have continually provoked God to anger by their disobedience (vv. 30-33). They have put idols in the temple and sacrificed children in the Valley of Hinnom (cf. 7.29-34).

35. Molech

This is the Hebrew word for 'king' given the vowels of *bosheth*, 'shame'.

36. The city is given to Babylon for conquest.

37-41. God will restore them and by an EVERLASTING COVENANT WILL NOT TURN AWAY FROM DOING GOOD TO THEM.

42. Just as God brought evil so he will bring good.

43-44. Fields shall be bought again in the desolate land and in all parts of the country.

The disciples of Jeremiah treasured his writings and transmitted them to us, and we should be grateful to them. But they did not always understand him. They did not understand that in Jeremiah's conviction, hardly come by but steadfastly held, the fall of Jerusalem was part of God's goodness to his people. They did not understand that to say that, after the restoration, God's people could rely on God never turning away from doing good to them (v. 40) was to miss the lesson that Jeremiah believed was being worked out in the events of his time, and, in response to God, in a derivative way in his own ministry.

LATER HOPES FOR PROSPERITY, SECURITY AND CONTINUITY 33.1-26

This chapter may be described as a series of meditations upon Jeremianic themes—all of which we have met before. It is linked with the 'book of comfort' (chs. 30-31) by being the same kind of material, and with ch. 32 because the editor has deliberately placed the chapter in the same setting (v. 1).

JERUSALEM, PARTLY DESTROYED IN THE
SIEGE, WILL HAVE ABUNDANCE OF
PROSPERITY AND SECURITY
33.1-9

This is a meditation on restoration grouped around a genuine word from Jeremiah in vv. 4 f. uttered at the time of the siege. In that sense the editorial note (v. 1) is right.

2-3. These verses are reminiscent of Deutero-Isaiah (cf. 45.18; 47.4; 48.6), and are not in Jeremiah's true idiom.

3. the hidden things (RSV)

These are apparently the rebuilding of Judah and Israel.

4-5. The Hebrew is difficult. Read, with RSV, THE HOUSES . . . WHICH WERE TORN DOWN TO MAKE A DEFENCE AGAINST THE SIEGE MOUNDS AND BEFORE THE SWORD: THE CHALDEANS ARE COMING IN TO FIGHT AND TO FILL THEM WITH . . . DEAD BODIES.

Chaldeans

See the comment in the Introduction, p. 21.

6-9. The abstract generality of these verses accords very oddly with the concreteness of vv. 4 f. What is promised is health and healing, prosperity and security, cleansing from sin, and the fear of the nations before all the good that God does for his people. Verse 9 seems to fall on the wrong side of the narrow dividing line between glorifying God for the good that he has done, and satisfaction that, of course, the business of God is to provide prosperity (cf. 30.16 f.) While the verses are on Jeremic themes, we cannot be confident that they conform to his standards of true prophecy (23.16-22).

JERUSALEM AND JUDAH—THOUGH WASTE—
WILL REJOICE AGAIN
33.10-11

The return of joy we have already met with in a genuine poem of Jeremiah (31.4 f.) and in others attributed to him (30.19; 31.12-14). Here Judah is a waste land. Jeremiah's prophecies of desolation will be reversed (cf. 7.34; 16.9; 25.10), and psalms of thanksgiving such as Ps. 136.1 will be sung. A pleasant hope.

FLOCKS WILL AGAIN BE KEPT IN THE
JUDEAN COUNTRYSIDE
33.12-13

We have also met with this hope before (31.24). It picks up the description of the countryside in 17.26; 32.44.

A COMMENTARY UPON JEREMIAH'S HOPE
FOR A TRUE KING (23.5-6). THE DAVIDIC
KINGDOM AND THE LEVITICAL
PRIESTHOOD WILL NEVER FAIL
33.14-26

This passage, which is not in the LXX, probably circulated as an independent flysheet before it was added to the prophecies associated with the name of Jeremiah. It is an application of Jeremiah's thought of the nature of a true king (23.5-6) to the circumstances of a different age. (In v. 16 the name given to the king in 23.6 is attributed to Jerusalem.) It is a warning that any preacher wants his hearers not merely to accept his words but to accept them in the way that he says them. This is the use of Jeremiah's words for purposes of which he would not have approved. It has been dated either

in the time of Haggai and Zerubbabel (Hag. 1.1; 2.23; Zech. 4.11-14; 6.9-13) or in that of Malachi (Mal. 2.4, 8, 17; 3.14 f.).

What the writer says is that the permanent existence of the Davidic line and of the Levitical priesthood are guaranteed (contrast 22.30: the idea is completely opposed to Jeremiah's understanding of the knowledge of God). The writer insists twice over that this is as certain as the order of nature (vv. 20, 25; see the comment on 31.35-37).

24. This is the most valuable verse, which makes it clear that the passage is an attempted answer to the doubters and pessimists who say, 'THE LORD HAS REJECTED THE TWO FAMILIES (i.e. Israel and Judah) WHICH HE CHOSE.' This is very near to the truth. It was the question that gave St Paul at a later date very real agony (Rom. 11.1). It is, if you like, another repetition of Jeremiah's teaching without understanding. Jeremiah taught that God had rejected his two families—not in the sense of casting them off and leaving them without hope, but that through his hostility they might be brought back to a true faith in him, a true way of life, and hope that would not make them ashamed. The difficulty is important, but the writer has given the wrong answer to it.

JEREMIAH UNDER JEHOIAKIM AND ZEDEKIAH

34.1-36.32

BABYLON WILL CONQUER BUT ZEDEKIAH
WILL DIE IN PEACE

34.1-7

This word to King Zedekiah comes almost at the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reply to Zedekiah's revolt in 589-8 (see

39.1-2; II Kings 24.20-25.1). The southern part of Judah is quickly overrun—only the stronger cities Lachish¹ and Azekah were still holding out. Jeremiah believes not only that victory for Babylon is inevitable, but also that, though Zedekiah has not continued to heed the warning that he was given early in his reign (27.12-15), if he surrenders at once all will be well. In point of fact, of course, Zedekiah did not surrender at once, but the siege of Jerusalem dragged out its time and then Zedekiah was blinded and died in prison (39.7; 52.8-11; II Kings 25.5-7; cf. Ezek. 12.13). It almost looks as though the King of Babylon had heard of this prophecy, and because of Zedekiah's obstinacy resolved to treat him in an exactly opposite way.

2-5. Rudolph has suggested that we come nearer to what Jeremiah actually said by removing the phrase AND HE SHALL BURN IT WITH FIRE (v. 2) and the phrase AND YOU SHALL GO TO BABYLON (v. 3) and treating the words IN JERUSALEM (v. 6) as belonging after YOU SHALL DIE IN PEACE (v. 5). Whether or not this is so, Jeremiah's kindly feelings towards Zedekiah are manifest. Perhaps he thought of this vacillating king, 'There but for the grace of God go I,' remembering his own uncertainties of mind which yet did not for him inhibit bold and resolute action.

The account we owe to Baruch, though the flamboyancy of v. 1 may be due to editorial revision.

5. burn spices for you

The Hebrews did not practise cremation, but spices were burnt after the death of a king (see II Chron. 16.14; 21.19).

¹ Extracts from the Lachish letters, discovered in 1935, which date from this time, are easily available in *Documents from Old Testament Times*, ed. D. Winton Thomas, 1958.

THE BROKEN PLEDGE TO SLAVES MAKES
DESTRUCTION EVEN MORE CERTAIN
34.8-22

This shameful incident is later than the above. The siege of Jerusalem has begun and is making its effects felt.

8-11. *A solemn pledge to slaves repudiated.* It is not to be understood that the freeing of the slaves was prompted by altruistic motives. Because of the siege the work of the slaves in the fields outside the city was impossible and they became an economic liability. In addition, as free men they could be asked to take an active share in the defence of the city. But the decision to free them was deliberate, and sealed by royal proclamation. When the siege was temporarily lifted (v. 11) because the Babylonians had to deal with the Egyptian army (see 37.5), the slave owners repudiated their solemn word and re-enslaved those who had been freed.

12-16. *The double turning for and against the covenant.* Jeremiah was horrified. The account we have comes from Baruch (though the Deuteronomistic editor has put in the reference to the law about the freeing of slaves in Deut. 15.1-18; this is not relevant; it is not obedience to a particular law that is in question, but obedience to God's covenant with his people). And through the account we are made aware of Jeremiah's intense indignation at the meanness and untrustworthiness of what has been done. He thinks of it in terms of his favourite image of turning (which is obscured by the RSV reading REPENTED instead of TURNED in v. 15). The one act—the freeing of the slaves—was a turning towards God in accord with the spirit of the generous heart inculcated by God's covenant; the other act was a deliberate turning away from God and a repudiation not only of their solemn word but of the way of life that belongs to God's people.

17-22. *God proclaims to the people freedom for destruction.*

As a result (THEREFORE) because they will not give freedom, they will be given a freedom that they do not want—a freedom to be destroyed by conquest. Alternatively, this may be expressed by saying that, because they have not kept the terms of their solemn pledge, the curse which, in making it, they took upon themselves, if they should prove false, will actually be worked out in their capture and death. For the King of Babylon's army, which has withdrawn, will come back and take the city.

17c, 22c. These are exaggerations which show how deeply Jeremiah felt. People who act in this way do not deserve to escape destruction.

18-19. Cf. the similar ceremony in Gen. 15.9-17; because of this the making of a covenant was spoken of as 'cutting' a covenant.

A LESSON IN OBEDIENCE FROM THE
RECHABITES
35.1-19

With this chapter we are brought back to the reign of King Jehoiakim, and probably to the year 602, after he had revolted from Babylon, when Nebuchadnezzar, according to II Kings 24.2, encouraged marauding bands of his own people and Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites to invade Judah. The chapter is certainly historical and comes from Baruch's narrative, though it has been worked over by the Deuteronomistic editor and is unnecessarily repetitive (vv. 8-10) and expansive (vv. 13-15).

The single lesson of the chapter (v. 16) is one which is dear to the heart of Jeremiah and which he has stressed many times already (see 2.11 f., 32; 5.20-25; 8.4-7; 18.13-17)—the customs

of nations and the habits of animate and inanimate nature show a faithfulness which is not to be found in God's people. The Rechabites have been faithful to their founder in the limited requirements he laid upon them: why cannot Judah and Jerusalem be faithful to the greater obedience of the living God? The answer is, of course, that this faithfulness requires a much greater transformation of life: and yet Jeremiah brings out the unnaturalness of human sinning and the wonder of that fellowship which is spoilt by unfaithfulness.

The chapter is in three sections.

1-11. The loyalty of the Rechabites is tested and remains firm.

2. house of the Rechabites
'Sect of the Rechabites'.

chambers

Read either with Moffatt 'side-rooms' or with Knox 'apartments'.

6. father

Here 'founder'. The Rechabites were founded by Jonathan the son of Rechab, who was a fanatical supporter of Jehu in his slaughter of the line of Ahab and of the worshippers of Baal (II Kings 10.15-28). While some of the prophets believed that Israel had been more faithful in the desert period (cf. 2.2-3; Hos. 2.15; 9.10; 11.1-2) and sought to keep her true to the Mosaic covenant, the Rechabites dissociated themselves from the externals of Canaanite civilization (cf. the Nazirites, Num. 6.1-21). There is thus a kinship between the faithfulness which Jeremiah desires for his people and that shown by the Rechabites, but also a great difference. Jeremiah is calling attention to the principle of the Rechabites' faithfulness, not to its specific content.

12-17. This section expounds the moral of this act. By contrast how disloyal is Judah. Disaster is inevitable.

13. Cf. 2.30; 7.28; 17.23; 32.33.

14. Cf. 7.13; 11.7; 32.33.

15. Cf. 7.3, 7, 25, 26; 11.8; 18.11; 25.3-7; 26.5; 29.19; 34.14.

17. Cf. 19.15.

18-19. A supplement to the incident: God's blessing will be on the Rechabites for their loyalty, which will enable them to perpetuate themselves within the family of Israel. These verses must not be taken as the point of the story. If they are from Jeremiah, they do not imply approval of the Rechabite principles, but merely call attention to the principle of loyalty as self-perpetuating. In a disintegrating world, faithfulness, even to something limited, is a strength. But God's people are not faithful. They have not listened and obeyed.

KING JEHOIAKIM BURNS JEREMIAH'S SCROLL,
AND JEREMIAH DICTATES A LARGER ONE
TO BARUCH
36.1-32

With the present chapter we turn back still earlier in the reign of Jehoiakim to his fourth and fifth years (vv. 1, 9). We have already met (25.1-14) the fourth year of Jehoiakim as the time when Jeremiah summed up the outcome of his prophecies to date, and we shall meet it again in God's word to Baruch (45.1-5), which expresses the strain in the mind of Baruch owing to the events of this chapter, and his release from it.

3. The remedial purpose of Jeremiah's prophesying is clearly expressed. It is that Judah should turn to God. Even when it becomes clear that disaster is inevitable, it is still the purpose of his prophesying that through disaster Judah should turn

to God and find forgiveness and renewal. But here there was still hope that disaster might be averted.

5. Jeremiah was DEBARRED FROM GOING to the temple (RSV, as against AV, I AM SHUT UP), no doubt because of the impact of his temple sermon (7.1-15; 26.1-6) which was some time earlier. He was greatly impressed by the decisive importance of Nebuchadrezzar's defeat of Egypt at Carchemish in 605 (see 46.2-12) and thought that the time had come to focus the impact of his prophesying. So in the year of Carchemish he dictated his prophecies, and in December of the same year (v. 22) he asked Baruch to read them publicly.

This chapter contains the only description given in the Old Testament of the making of a prophetic book. The material used was papyrus, and a scroll was made by pasting a number of sheets together. Jehoiachim's PENKNIFE (v. 23) was a scribe's knife used for cutting the sheets of papyrus. Ink was made by mixing root with watery gum.

10. The first of the three readings took place in the temple—in the apartments, as we have noticed already (see 26.24; cf. 35.2), of Gemariah the brother of Ahikam, who had protected Jeremiah on the occasion of the temple sermon. It took place ON A FAST DAY (vv. 6, 9) called probably because of the failure of the early rain (cf. 14.12; Joel 1.14; 2.15). In this setting the reading of Jeremiah's prophecies of judgment would be appropriate.

11-19. The response of the political officials—the princes—is very much to their credit. They treat the prophecies as a matter of very great importance. Gemariah's son Micaiah reports to them what has happened, and they send Jehudi as a messenger to ask Baruch to come and read the scroll to them too. When they have heard it they are afraid—afraid of what may be coming upon their country, afraid of what the king will say and do, and afraid of what will happen to Jeremiah

and Baruch. There is no trace in them of cynical indifference to what has been said, and their respect and affection and goodwill to Jeremiah are very marked. They want to know all about it from Baruch, whom they have cautiously asked to come and see them, and they warn him that he and Jeremiah must lie hidden for a time. Later (v. 25) three of them, including Gemariah, are willing to risk the king's anger by pleading with him not to burn the roll.

20-26. The response of King Jehoiakim and his immediate entourage is very different. It is a combination of cynical indifference and hostility. Jehoiakim and Jeremiah stood on opposite sides of the fence both religiously and politically. It looks as if Jehoiakim had made up his mind not to make in his own life the mistakes that he believed that his father had done by taking the demand for religious reformation too seriously (II Kings 22.1-23.25) and by trying conclusions with Egypt (II Kings 23.29 f.). Jeremiah's demand for an even deeper reformation and for recognizing Babylon as the supreme world power was doubly offensive to him. So he listened unmoved to the prophecies, cut them up bit by bit and threw the pieces into THE FIRE IN THE BRAZIER (AV, ON THE HEARTH). And he sought to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch, but they were hidden owing to the goodness of God (v. 26) and faithful friends.

27-32. Jehoiakim's response does not daunt the prophet's ardour, it only spurs him on. He dictates again to Baruch what he had said in the first roll (some of which must have stuck in Baruch's mind after one transcription and two readings) and added to it (v. 32). He recognizes the king's action as challenging the whole basis of his own action (v. 29, WHY . . . ?). Jeremiah's answer is not given, but it would have been in terms of 23.16-22. What Jeremiah has written has come out of a true listening to God, and it is the morally transforming word that Judah needs to hear at this time. What is given is

Jeremiah's conviction that Jehoiakim is a bad man and that dishonour must come to him. This prophecy, as we have seen (22.18 f.), was not literally fulfilled. Jehoiakim did die in peace and his son Jehoiachin sat on the throne, even if only for three months. But Jehoiakim only escaped by the skin of his teeth the disaster his own policies had engendered, and he left an evil legacy to his people. The chapter tells of a clear conflict between two different ways of living.

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM: JEREMIAH AND KING ZEDEKIAH IN CONTRAST 37.1-38.28; 39.15-18

EDITORIAL STATEMENT ON ZEDEKIAH'S DISOBEDIENCE 37.1-2

The scene now changes to the siege of Jerusalem in 589-587 and the editor wants to emphasize that this is a different situation from the last chapter. The RSV makes it clear that it was Zedekiah whom Nebuchadrezzar had MADE KING, and not Jehoiachin the son of Jehoiakim (Coniah, see 22.24-27). And the editor describes the situation—more harshly than the facts—as an absolute refusal, by the king, by his servants, by the people, to obey God's word through Jeremiah. To listen means, of course, to hear and obey.

DURING THE TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF THE BABYLONIANS JEREMIAH RETURNS A FIRM ANSWER TO ZEDEKIAH'S REQUEST 37.3-10

The Babylonians will come back again. We have already read in 34.8-22 of the shameful breaking of the pledge to slave

that took place during the temporary raising of the siege. When the Babylonians withdrew, King Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah (Jehucal is the Jucal of 38.1, one of those incensed against Jeremiah; Zephaniah the priest is mentioned also at 21.1; 29.25-29; 52.24) to ask him to pray that all would be well. It was no doubt on the strength of an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt (590-570, mentioned by name in 44.30) that Zedekiah had revolted. He now asks for Jeremiah's approval of his policy. But Jeremiah has no doubt that wishful thinking and self-deception (v. 9) has been the determining factor, and he expresses the inevitability of a Babylonian victory in striking and uncompromising terms (v. 10).

JEREMIAH IS IMPRISONED ON A CHARGE OF DESERTION 37.11-15

During the temporary lull Jeremiah attempts to leave the city 'to take over some property among his own people' (Moffatt; the Hebrew translated in RSV as TO RECEIVE HIS PORTION, AV, TO SEPARATE HIMSELF, is obscure). It is natural to think that this was an earlier concern for what later resulted in his purchase of the field at Anathoth (32.6-15). The authorities were naturally sensitive about the number of desertions which were actually taking place (see 38.19; 39.9; 52.15), so a zealous sentry refuses to listen to Jeremiah's protests, and brings him to what we might call 'the war cabinet', who BEAT HIM AND IMPRISONED HIM in an underground cellar belonging to Jonathan the secretary.

JEREMIAH IS INTERVIEWED BY KING ZEDEKIAH
AND GIVEN BETTER PRISON CONDITIONS
BY HIM
37.16-21

After many days in these foul conditions and when, apparently, the Babylonians had resumed their siege of Jerusalem (v. 19) Zedekiah has him up to his own apartments, perhaps believing that he must now be softened up sufficiently to prophesy that all would be well, and yet that because he was a prophet of God the word would come true. Here the contrast between the king and his prisoner, between the man who does not know God and the man who does, is impressive. When we think of all the distress Jeremiah has endured to accept God's word for this situation (cf. esp. 12.5; 15.15-21, 20.7-10, 12, 11), is he going to give it up for the favour of a weak king who cannot stand for what he believes to be right and is tormented by fear and helplessness? Is he going to give it up because of harsh imprisonment, even because of the death of the body? No, the knowledge of God has become that by which and for which he lives (cf. 31.31-34). So when Zedekiah says, 'IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD?' Jeremiah says, 'THERE IS,' and reiterates that inevitable doom (cf. v. 10) that Zedekiah pretends to himself that he can escape.

Because Zedekiah knows in his heart that what Jeremiah is saying is true, Jeremiah can put his own questions to the king. What wrong has Jeremiah ever done him? The prophets who deserve punishment are those who have said that he could revolt from Babylon with impunity. Unless Zedekiah means to kill him, he must treat him better. And Zedekiah grants him, as we have seen (32.1-5), the easier conditions of the COURT OF THE GUARD, to which there is free access from the outside world, and minimum rations (a small round loaf a day) to keep him alive, till the city's food was exhausted (52.2).

DURING THE LAST STAGES OF THE SIEGE THE
POLITICAL OFFICIALS THROW JEREMIAH INTO
AN EMPTY WELL TO DIE
38.1-6

It is understandable that those whose religious and political convictions were different from those of Jeremiah's should resent his indefatigable persistence. Between 37.21 and 38.1 the moral atmosphere has deteriorated through the breaking of the agreement with the slaves (34.8-22) and the coming nearer of the inevitable end (39.2). So the political officials, who are clearly different from those of Jehoiakim's reign (see 36.12), and two of whom, Jucal, who has been rebuffed by Jeremiah (37.3-10), and Gedaliah, whose father had probably put Jeremiah in the stocks (20.1-6), had cause for resentment, tell the king that Jeremiah must die. Of the thoughts that they ascribe to Jeremiah v. 3 is the basic one; v. 2 (given also at 21.9) is at least a reasonable inference from his teaching. Their complaint is twofold: (1) that he weakens the hands of the soldiers. This is the perpetual complaint of soldiers against political discussion in time of war. (2) That he is not seeking the welfare of this people but their harm. This is plainly false.

King Zedekiah bows to the storm of their anger in a formula which apparently gave them a free hand short of Jeremiah's death. So they threw him into a water cistern (cf. the action of Ishmael in 41.9) which was empty, but not cleaned and in a filthy condition. There he could have no contact with anybody else and could be left to rot. (RSV and other translations have CISTERN where the AV has DUNGEON. It is probable that the ordinary reader gets the right impression if he thinks of it as an empty well.)

HE IS RESCUED FROM IT BY EBED-MELECH
38.7-13

This story is a moving testimony both to the affection and goodwill which Jeremiah himself inspired, and to the courage and humanity of ordinary people. This unknown Ethiopian steward—his name means 'servant of the king', and this is all we know of him—risked his own life and position by telling the king, whose weak character he would know only too well, that this ought not to be tolerated. Apparently Zedekiah had not yet heard what action the princes had taken after he had capitulated to them (v. 5).

9. for there is no bread in the city

Omit these words, which are an unhelpful editorial insertion from 37.21. If there was no bread, there was no bread for anyone. Jeremiah's hunger came from being shut up in the cistern. The king feeds upon the courage as he is intimidated by the hostility of those near him, and he veers round to give permission for Jeremiah's release.

10. three men (RSV)

This is the right reading here (AV has THIRTY MEN).

11. The personal compassion and humanity of the Ethiopian come out in the way he uses his knowledge of the palace property to care for a maltreated prisoner. From a WARDROBE OF THE STOREHOUSE (RSV) he took OLD RAGS AND WORN-OUT CLOTHES so that Jeremiah's armpits should not be hurt still worse as they drew him out. And Jeremiah went back unmolested to his life in THE COURT OF THE GUARD. Evidently the princes realized that they had gone too far.

GOD'S PROMISE TO EBED-MELECH
39.15-18

These verses fall to be considered here because they refer to the Ethiopian, and because even according to the editor they come from the period of Jeremiah's life in THE COURT OF THE GUARD. Though some of the language may be editorial, the heart of it is a promise that in the capture of the city Ebed-melech will not be handed over to those whose hostility he has aroused, and a recognition that the action that he has taken has come from his personal TRUST in God. (For another Ethiopian believer, cf. Acts 8.26-39.)

KING ZEDEKIAH'S LAST INTERVIEW WITH
JEREMIAH
38.14-23

King Zedekiah had no peace of mind. He could neither accept Jeremiah's counsel nor forget about it. So he summons him again to question him. But Jeremiah first requires reassurance. He needs to know how far he can trust the king. He knows how much toll the siege is taking of Zedekiah's frail moral courage. But he accepts the king's solemn oath that he will neither kill him nor hand him over to be killed. Yet he cannot alter the choice that lies before the king. Either he must surrender while there is still some advantage to the Babylonians in his so doing, and be well-treated in consequence, or he must wait till the Babylonians lay hold of Jerusalem for themselves and expect the worst. But if Zedekiah can conquer his fears of the war party in Jerusalem so far as to surrender, then he is afraid of rough treatment at the hands of those who have gone over to Babylon (cf. 39.9; 52.15).

20-23. Jeremiah sees the point, but knows that the king cannot afford to dwell on it. His only chance is to surrender as soon as possible. Jeremiah tells Zedekiah of the vision he has seen of the palace women (cf. II Kings 24.15) chanting a dirge (rightly printed by the RSV as poetry) about false friends deserting in the day of trouble. Those whose opinions had overborne Zedekiah's own were in fact not to be trusted, and now it is not Jeremiah who is IN THE MIRE (as he had been physically in the cistern, v. 6) but the unhappy king. Verse 23 recapitulates the point again in prose.

JEREMIAH CONCEALS FROM THE POLITICAL
OFFICIALS THE NATURE OF HIS
INTERVIEW WITH THE KING
38.24-27

Jeremiah's words did nothing to lift Zedekiah out of his state of unhappy inaction. The king, however, concludes the interview, according to the text, by asking Jeremiah to conceal from the princes the fact that he has turned once again to the prophet, and to make it appear that the initiative in the interview came from Jeremiah, who was anxious not to be returned to the dungeon in Jonathan's house (37.15 f., 20). It has been argued that these verses properly belong to the first interview where there is a reference to the house of Jonathan: and it is asserted that in the later stages of the siege the princes would not have accepted such an excuse. Against that it must be said that there is no easy way of tearing these verses out of chapter 38 and of inserting them in chapter 39, and that it was precisely in the later stages of the siege that Zedekiah was so nervous and afraid. Whichever it was, it involved Jeremiah in a partial concealment of the truth. It is clear that Jeremiah regarded this as a necessary part of his pastoral duty to the king, for whom he obviously

felt compassion, just as the king drew moral strength from his meeting with Jeremiah even if he could not conquer his own inhibitions sufficiently to act with resolution.

JEREMIAH REMAINS IN THE COURT OF THE
GUARD UNTIL JERUSALEM IS TAKEN
38.28

This verse rounds off the two chapters dealing specially with the siege, and though the last part of the verse belongs with ch. 39, and has been repeated by the RSV at 39.3, yet we are glad to have here the picture of Jeremiah in the court of the guard waiting for Jerusalem to be taken.

JEREMIAH AND THE COMMUNITY DURING AND AFTER THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 39.1-14; 40.1-44.30

JEREMIAH AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 39.1-14; 40.1-6

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 39.1-10, 13-14

Whoever was responsible for inserting here an account of the fall of Jerusalem did us a service, because though we are interested in the life and work of Jeremiah, and not general history (contrast 40.7-41.18), the fall of Jerusalem cannot be dissociated from the life of Jeremiah without disrupting it. It was foreshadowed in his inaugural visions of an almond shoot and a boiling pot (1.11-16) and it lay heavily on his spirit during all the intervening period. It is given here (1) in a shorter form than in the fuller historical account in 52.4-16 = II Kings 25.1-12; (2) interrelated with the answer to the question 'What happened to Jeremiah?' The LXX omits vv. 4-13 though it includes ch. 52 (except vv. 28-30). The omission may be accidental, but if not it is an error of judgment. It seems right to treat the fall of Jerusalem here, using any additional information conveyed by 52.4-16.

1-2. *The fall of the city* (abbreviated from 52.4-7a). The opening verses give the length of the siege as being from December 589 to June 587—indeed the ninth of June is

specified. The account in ch. 52 adds that the city held out till the food was completely exhausted (cf. 37.21).

2. Read with RSV, A BREACH WAS MADE IN THE CITY.

4-7. *The flight, capture and imprisonment of Zedekiah and the death of his sons and princes* (abbreviated from 52.7b-11). In spite of the vacillation of Zedekiah, the Book of Jeremiah makes us feel something of Jeremiah's compassion for him, and the story of his brutal treatment at the hands of the Babylonians strikes us as particularly revolting. Yet he had brought it on his own head. The soldiers fled by way of the Jordan valley (the Arabah) towards Jericho. Nebuchadrezzar's headquarters were at Riblah on the river Orontes in Syria, 50 miles south of Hamath. This was a convenient centre for gaining control of the whole of Syria and Palestine. It had been so used by Pharaoh Neco earlier (see II Kings 23.33). 52.8 adds that Zedekiah's army was scattered and 52.11 that Zedekiah was put in prison till the day of his death.

8. *The destruction of the city* (abbreviated from 52.13 f.). In this verse insert, with the latest edition of the Hebrew Bible (Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*), 'and the temple'. 52.13 gives it more fully, 'And he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem', and it is dated as a month later than the capture of the city (52.12). The destruction of the temple recalls 7.14; 26.6.

9-10. *The people carried into exile except those left to till the soil* (abbreviated from 52.15 f.). Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, was appointed by Nebuchadrezzar to supervise the settlement in Palestine. His arrival a month after the capture of the city is described in 52.12. The description here and in 52.15 f. of the extent of the deportation is contradicted by the modest number (832) given in 52.29, by the events of 40.7-41.18, and by common sense. The presence of some people of administrative ability in a conquered territory is

necessary to every conqueror. But, of course, the deportation, especially coming after the deportation of 597, was severe, and this is reflected in the account. (In 52.15 omit the words, SOME OF THE POOREST OF THE PEOPLE AND, which have crept in from the succeeding verse.)

3, 13, 14. *The Babylonians set Jeremiah free from prison.*

3. This verse was inserted into the above account, picking up the end of the last verse of ch. 38, as the RSV makes clear by putting at the beginning WHEN JERUSALEM WAS TAKEN. Verse 13 virtually repeats v. 3 because of the interruption. (The names in these two verses raise technical problems which need not be considered here.)

14. A description of Jeremiah's release from prison. The question is: are this verse and 39.11 f.; 40.1-6 alternative or complementary versions of Jeremiah's release? Different opinions are held, but on the whole it seems right to think of them as complementary—an immediate release of prisoners, and then a month later a gathering of all and sundry at Ramah, five miles north of Jerusalem, for Nebuzaradan to take the final decision about them. But if this is so, then the second part of v. 14 is premature. We learn from 40.5 that the King of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, the son of Jeremiah's old protector Ahikam (see 26.24), to be governor of the province of Judah. If Jeremiah had been handed over to Gedaliah at the time of the fall of Jerusalem, he would not need the further release by Nebuzaradan; and the statement that he dwelt among the people means that he took up residence in Judah, which, if 40.1-6 is a supplement, was not finally settled till 40.6.

It may be that the original form of v. 14 has been modified under the influence of 40.5. And it is perhaps not to be wondered at that the account of so confusing a situation should itself be confused.

JEREMIAH FINALLY SET FREE: HE
CHOOSES TO REMAIN IN JUDAH
39.11-12; 40.1-6

In spite of the scepticism of some scholars, there seems no reason to doubt the broad historical truth of these verses. Zedekiah had been troubled about the Jews who had deserted to the Babylonians (38.19) and it is likely that they conveyed the intelligence that Jeremiah had been against revolting, had consistently advised surrender, and had been unshakable in his confidence that Babylon would be victorious. The knowledge of the situation that is presupposed in the choice of Gedaliah to be governor is likely to have given the Babylonian command the sense that they ought to deal generously with Jeremiah.

40.1-6. The order is confused. The opening phrase (down to LORD) is inapplicable. The latest edition of the Hebrew Bible suggests the order 2a, 1b, 2b-6a, 1ab (AFTER NEBUZARDADAN . . . HAD LET HIM GO FROM RAMAH), 6b.

2-3. The Jeremianic theology of these verses is not likely to belong to Nebuzaradan, but it is natural for a Hebrew writer to tell the story in terms of his own convictions. But the free choice offered to Jeremiah is likely to be authentic, as is the free decision of Jeremiah to remain in Judah and to give his support to Gedaliah. Jeremiah expressed in his poems his love for his own country, he was convinced that God had a future for it, and whatever God did for those who were exiles in Babylon, he was quite certain that his own duty and service were to remain in Judah whatever its varying fortunes. What we miss is any account of the relationship between Jeremiah and Gedaliah.

5. Read, with RSV, IF YOU REMAIN, THEN RETURN TO GEDALIAH, and also AN ALLOWANCE OF FOOD AND A PRESENT.

6. Mizpah

The seat of Gedaliah's administration, four or five miles north-west of the ruined city.

THE RULE OF GEDALIAH AND HIS MURDER

(a non-Jeremianic section)

40.7-41.18

This account of events after the fall of Jerusalem must come from a contemporary source, though it is difficult to think of Baruch himself giving so long an account without mentioning Jeremiah. The essential events are given in II Kings 25.22-26 (see 40.7-10; 41.1 f., 16-18), of which v. 26 covers also the flight to Egypt dealt with in 42.1-43.7.

The Babylonians decided not to persist with the Davidic line whose end Jeremiah had foreseen (22.30; 36.30) but to appoint Gedaliah, a man of a family of good standing (see 26.24), who apparently stood by Jeremiah's religious and political wisdom.

9-10. Gedaliah promises the resistance groups that all will be well.

11-12. The refugees from Moab, Ammon and elsewhere return and gather in the harvest. It is a tribute to the merciful power of Babylon that the countryside was not ravaged as it had been by the Assyrians in 701 BC (see Isa. 1.7-9).

Gedaliah is apparently (40.15) the one man with sufficient personality, standing and administrative ability to hold Judah together in its present distressed condition. But he has one

fatal blemish. He is too unsuspicious of the wickedness of human nature (contrast 17.9). When he is warned by Johanan, his military commander, that Ishmael is in league with Ammon and is a dangerous enemy, he refuses to listen. He was no doubt right in saying to Johanan about his plan to kill Ishmael secretly, YOU SHALL NOT DO THIS THING, but his reason for saying so, YOU ARE SPEAKING FALSELY OF ISHMAEL, betrays a bad judgment of men which is his downfall and the means of bringing further disaster on Judah.

41.1. According to the dating here Ishmael's assassination of Gedaliah took place IN THE SEVENTH MONTH, apparently only two months since Nebuzaradan came to make the settlement in Palestine (52.12; see the comment at 39.9 f.). If so, the passions aroused by the siege of Jerusalem would clearly not have had time to cool; but the time is so short that it seems more likely that the evidence in 52.30 that the reprisals by Babylon took place after five years means that there was a larger interval, and that we have been given the beginning and the end of Gedaliah's governorship.

Ishmael was of THE ROYAL FAMILY (RSV). He probably resented the appointment of Gedaliah and was, no doubt, rightly indignant over the harsh treatment given to King Zedekiah (39.6 f.). He was apparently a fanatical anti-Babylonian to whom Gedaliah's policy of accepting the Babylonian sovereignty and seeking to live in peace under it was anathema. He also belonged to a type bred in times of violence which can destroy but has no constructive ability whatever. The treachery of the act is plain (v. 1), though v. 3, which contradicts v. 10, is plainly an exaggeration.

49. Violence begets violence. The assassination of Gedaliah is followed by the senseless slaughter of seventy out of eighty pilgrims from Samaria who had come to worship at Jerusalem (v. 5). (The temple, even if in ruins, was still sacred, and if Gedaliah's governorship lasted for more than two months

there may have been some re-erection of a shrine. The hostility between the Samaritans and the Jews did not begin till the return from exile; see Ezra 4.1-6; Hag. 2.14.) Only ten saved their lives by revealing hidden stores of food. The dumping of the slain bodies into a large water cistern built as part of Jerusalem's defence supply (1 Kings 15.22) is in keeping with the irresponsibility of this macabre act.

10. All Ishmael can then do is to depart to Ammon taking with him the company under Gedaliah's protection at Mizpah, which included, owing to Babylonian clemency, some princesses of the royal family.

11-18. Johanan, the military commander, who knew his limitations except in that role (40.15), can at least now take action. Before Ishmael has gone a mile or two Johanan has caught up with him, to the thankful relief of most of those with him. And while Ishmael with eight others escapes to Ammon, Johanan brings the rest to a spot near Bethlehem as much south of Jerusalem as Mizpah was to the north. His intention is plain. He is a soldier, not a politician. He is sure that Babylon will retaliate for the assassination of Gedaliah, and he thinks that the only thing to do is to escape to Egypt.

THE PEOPLE GO TO EGYPT AGAINST THE ADVICE OF JEREMIAH 42.1-43.7

What was happening to Jeremiah during the events of the previous section we do not know. If he was in the company at Mizpah whom Ishmael attempted to take with him, then it is surprising that he was not murdered. Here again (cf. 36.26) friendly hands sheltered him. But before the journey to Egypt is actually taken, he is consulted. This section in some way continues Baruch's narrative (whether or not it was written by

him) and embodies his experiences—though it has suffered some expansion (cf. 42.17 f.) and shows some confusion (it is better to read 43.1-3 before 42.19-22).

THE PEOPLE SEEK GOD'S WORD THROUGH JEREMIAH 42.1-6

There is no reason to doubt the people's sincerity in seeking God's blessing on what they are about to do. So much that is disastrous has happened that they don't want to be wrong. Only they don't realize how far they have already decided the issue in their own minds (cf. 41.17 f.). Jeremiah needs a pledge from them, as he had needed it from Zedekiah (see 38.15 f.), and they commit themselves (vv. 5-6): whether it is good or evil we will obey.

GOD'S ANSWER 42.7-18

Jeremiah took ten days to find the answer, as earlier (28.12) he had waited for the answer to Hananiah to come to him. Ought Jeremiah to have given the answer immediately before the feeling of commitment had time to alter? Did he hope that, if he waited, the sense of upheaval would have faded? We do not know. He may well have decided that he had heard so much glib speaking in the name of God (cf. 23.9-32) that he would never say anything until he was absolutely certain.

9-12. The word, as we would expect, is that they should remain in Judah. With the fall of Jerusalem, God's purpose towards his people is different. Whereas he had **PULLED** them down, his plan is now to **BUILD** them up. They must not be afraid of the King of Babylon; God will let them **REMAIN** (RSV) in their own land.

10. repent

This does not mean that God is sorry for what he has done, but that he has changed his mind for the future.

13-16. But if they go to Egypt to find peace, then the very dangers (of war and famine) which they go to escape will overtake them there.

17-18. A more forceful expression of the troubles that will come upon them.

ITS REJECTION BY THE PEOPLE
43.1-3

But when the answer comes the people are not ready to hear it. They break their pledge to Jeremiah, as earlier the pledge to slaves (34.8-11) had been broken. Of course they justify it by saying that Jeremiah is not telling the truth. Baruch has put him up to it. This is very life-like. This is evidence (as also 45.1-5) that Baruch was no mere unthinking amanuensis, but a confidant and friend of Jeremiah. And yet there is no reason to think that the report does not come from Baruch himself. He would know how untrue the excuse was. However much Baruch entered into Jeremiah's life, and however much Jeremiah would accept Baruch's direction, guidance and advice, when Jeremiah's mind was made up about what God wanted to say, neither what Baruch nor what anybody else said made any difference. But it is only an excuse. Their fear of the Babylonians is greater than their desire to do what God says through the prophet.

JEREMIAH'S STATEMENT OF THE
CONSEQUENCES OF THIS REJECTION
42.19-22

The language of this section may come from the Deuterono-

mistic editor, but it is quite clear that Jeremiah took the making and breaking of covenants seriously (cf. 11.1-13; 31.31-34), and this disobedience (whatever the human pressures that led to it) could only lead to a deterioration of their relationship with God, and to the bringing upon their own head those very external disasters they try to avoid. 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these these things shall be yours as well' (Matt. 6.33) is not an easy maxim to follow. But its opposite does not put anyone out of reach of trouble and heartbreak: in fact it provokes these things, and saps that energy of mind and heart by which alone they can be met.

THE PEOPLE GO TO EGYPT
43.4-7

So Johanan brought the company under his command (including Jeremiah and Baruch) to Egypt. Did Jeremiah and Baruch go willingly—to be with the people even though they had taken the wrong decision? We are not told, but it seems not. Jeremiah had acted to show God's purpose of goodwill to the land of Judah after the fall of Babylon (32.6-15); when given the choice of going to Babylon or staying in Judah he deliberately chose to stay in Judah (40.1-6); he did not think of these refugees as the source of God's re-creation of his people (chs. 42-44). It seems plain that he went to Egypt because he was forced to go. This duress may be part of the reason why we have no information (apart from the prophecies) about what happened to Jeremiah and Baruch in Egypt.

7. Tahpanhes

This is, as we have seen (2.16) the Greek Daphnae Pelusii, modern Tel-el-Defenneh, a fortress on the eastern branch of the Nile.

JEREMIAH IN EGYPT 43.8-44.30

We are not called upon to pity Jeremiah as we catch our last glimpse of him—dragged off to a country to which he did not want to go, and convinced that disaster lay ahead both for that country and for the group of his own people in it. He had long accepted the principle that the reward of service to God was even harder service (see esp. 12.5; 15.19-21). And he had tested out the life that God had given him in conflict with two kings (chs. 36-38), and knew beyond a shadow of doubt that he had taken the better path. He had seen the weight of the burden that God had placed upon his spirit about the enemy from the north come true in the fall of Jerusalem and he knew that, whatever the immediate circumstances, hope for his people lay ahead. And the new covenant of the knowledge of God which was his vision of God's purpose was his own precious possession. He does not need our pity. It is we who are to be pitied—that we do not have the information that we would like about what happened to Jeremiah and Baruch in Egypt, and more importantly that we are deprived of the chance of seeing Jeremiah's gifts fully used in a responsive atmosphere to build up his people in the knowledge of God. All we have is the picture of him indefatigable and undefeated.

NEBUCHADREZZAR'S THRONE WILL BE SET
UP IN EGYPT AND EGYPT WILL BE CLEANSED
AS A SHEPHERD'S CLOAK FROM VERMIN
43.8-13

This prophecy expresses Jeremiah's sense of God's hostility to the land and to the worship of Egypt. This hostility it was more important for his hearers to realize than any particular

fulfilment of the prophecy. Whereas he could urge the exiles in Babylon to pray to the Lord on its behalf, 'for in its welfare you will find your welfare' (29.7), in his judgment Egypt's power is uncertain and its religious atmosphere corrupting. Babylon did not in fact conquer Egypt. It remained independent till it was conquered by Cambyses of Persia, the son of Cyrus, in 525 BC. A fragmentary text in the British Museum¹ tells us that Nebuchadrezzar, in his thirty-seventh year (568-567 BC), invaded Egypt, but we do not know what happened.

9-13. Jeremiah's prophecy, as we have it here, is uncertain because of the difficulty of the Hebrew. The words translated MORTAR (RSV; AV, CLAY), PAVEMENT (RSV; AV, BRICK-KILN) and ROYAL CANOPY (RSV; AV, ROYAL PAVILION) are uncertain. But it is clear that Jeremiah retains his confidence in the power of Babylon as the instrument of God in his ruling of the world (v. 10, MY SERVANT, cf. 27.6), and asserts that Babylon will conquer Egypt.

11. The three results of invasion, disease (AV, DEATH), CAPTIVITY, and death (AV, THE SWORD).

But the prophecy expresses also God's hostility to the worship of Egypt. The temples will be burnt, and the idolatrous abominations done away.

12. Read with RSV, AS A SHEPHERD CLEANS HIS CLOAK OF VERMIN. This expresses Jeremiah's loathing and contempt for how the Egyptians sought to worship God.

13. The obelisks (RSV)

These sacred standing pillars (AV, IMAGES, Hebrew *matzeboth*) were, to the faithful worshippers of Jahweh, symbols of an alien faith (cf. II Kings 23.14; Deut. 16.21 f.).

¹ Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 1950, p. 308.

Heliopolis

Hebrew and AV, Bethshemesh, meaning House of the Sun. Only one of the obelisks of Heliopolis is still there: another is in Central Park, New York, and a third, 'Cleopatra's needle', on the Thames Embankment in London.

JEREMIAH PROPHESIES GOD'S HOSTILITY TO THOSE WHO DISOBEY HIM AND COMMIT IDOLATRY

44.1-14

(This section has suffered considerable expansion)

1-2, 7-8. These verses constitute Jeremiah's rebuke of the Jews in Egypt for idolatry. His whole ministry was concerned with bringing his people to a true knowledge of God—first in the hope that they might change their ways and the threat of disaster be removed, and then that, when the disaster came, the distinctive life of God's people could be maintained. When he found himself in Egypt the thing he feared was a reality. Not out of deliberate repudiation of Jahweh, the God of Judah, but because there was no depth of conviction that he and he alone is the true God, and because there was no marked transformation of life in fellowship with him, God's people were slipping into a conformity to the practice of the people among whom they lived, and all that was distinctive in their faith and life was disappearing. The result can only be that they will be CUT OFF from Judah—God's people—and faith in Jahweh, the God of Judah, will become an object of mockery and obviously powerless.

This word is a word to the whole of the Jewish community now living in Egypt (see 24.8). MIGDOL was the north-east corner, MEMPHIS (Hebrew Noph, cf. 2.16) was fourteen miles north of Cairo, and PATHROS was the name given to the whole of Upper (i.e. southern) Egypt. It is not the burning of incense (or sacrifice) which is condemned in itself: it is the allegiance

to an alien deity, the betrayal of their covenant relation with the living God, which is condemned.

3-6, 9-14. These verses are our expansion of the theme, conveying a warning and threat of punishment for the Jews in Egypt.

3-6. Here we are made to dwell on the thought of the constant disobedience of Judah and Jerusalem. With v. 3 cf. 19.4; with vv. 4-5 cf. 7.25 f.; with v. 6 cf. 7.20; 42.18.

9-10. The wickedness of kings and people (men and women) and their proud unwillingness to walk in the covenant way of God.

11-14. God's resolve to exterminate the Jews in Egypt. This is an even more drastic threat than that expressed in 42.17 f.

14. except some fugitives

This is a later editorial addition by the same editor who also added v. 28a: this is in conflict with the purpose of vv. 14a, 17. We have already seen this editor's hand at 4.27; 5.10, 18; 30.11. Because the later reality is not as drastic as the prophecy, which was meant to lead to a turning towards God, the prophecy is slightly modified. But this spoils the sense.

THE UNRESOLVED DEBATE ABOUT THE TRUE GOD: JAHWEH THE GOD OF JUDAH OR THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN?

44.15-23

The hostility between Jeremiah and the people which was there in the rejection of his word that they should stay in Judah (43.1-3) flares up and reveals its true character, not as a denial that Jeremiah has spoken truly in the name of Jahweh.

but as a rejection of Jahweh in favour of the undemanding Queen of Heaven, whose worship Jeremiah has already denounced at 7.17-20. The repudiation of Jeremiah and the God he proclaims comes from the women, but they make it plain that their husbands are fully implicated. They look back to the reign of Manasseh as the really good time when 'THEY HAD PLENTY OF FOOD, AND PROSPERED, AND SAW NO EVIL'. From the beginning in 621 of Josiah's reformation in the name of Jahweh the God of Judah, right up to the fall of Jerusalem and beyond, there has been nothing but trouble and calamity. And unless the worship of the true God is more important than an easy time, their argument cannot be refuted. The events of history as such do not establish in recalcitrant minds what God has been doing. They only bring us to the point of decision where we reveal where our hope lies. Jeremiah and the Jewish women have chosen differently. Jeremiah is, of course, not convinced by their argument, any more than they are by his, and points out (vv. 20-22; v. 23 is probably a later expansion) that the very things they look to as the cause of their prosperity are in fact the cause of the disaster that has come to the land of Judah. In the long run neither faith in God nor political wisdom comes from putting material needs first. But this is a matter of conviction, not proof, and the debate about it still continues.

15. a great assembly, all the people who dwelt in the land of Egypt

These words are an editorial importation from v. 1. Jeremiah was speaking to the group who had recently come from Mizpah.

**PUT IT TO THE TEST: THE SIGN OF GOD'S
HOSTILITY WILL BE THE SUBJECTION
OF PHARAOH HOPHRA
44.24-30**

Since the conflict between Jeremiah and the people is absolute, he says to them: All right! carry out your vows to the Queen of Heaven and see what happens. This will mean the complete disappearance of the Jewish group altogether. And you, THE REMNANT OF JUDAH, will come to know whether God's word or your word had real substance and vitality in it. And the sign of God's hostility will be the overthrow of Pharaoh Hophra just as Zedekiah was overthrown.

Pharaoh Hophra (590-570), who was in alliance with Zedekiah and sent an army to relieve the siege of Jerusalem (37.5), towards the end of his reign had to share his throne with Amasis, and was later murdered by him. Scholars are divided in opinion as to whether this prophecy was added later when Hophra was dead (note the careful distinction between HIS ENEMIES and NEBUCHADREZZAR, KING OF BABYLON), or whether it is a genuine expression of Jeremiah's conviction that disaster must come upon Egypt.

27. Behold I am watching over them for evil and not for good

This saying (cf. 1.11) does not represent an absolute intention on God's part. It is part of his covenant faithfulness as Judah's God. It is within an ultimate purpose of good. The only way that God can bring blessing to his people is to continue his implacable hostility to human sin. This is not a sign that he has ceased to care: it is the most serious and unmistakable evidence of his caring. The disasters of this life are meant to lead us back to God.

A POSTSCRIPT FROM THE REIGN OF
KING JEHOIAKIM: GOD'S WORD OF
WARNING AND COMFORT TO
BARUCH

45.1-5

Though some scholars want to accept this word of God to Baruch as a farewell oracle uttered on Jeremiah's deathbed, it seems better to accept the editor's dating of THE FOURTH YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM (see 25.1; 36.1) and to relate it to Jeremiah's dictation of the scroll of his prophecies (36.4). Just as Jeremiah experienced the difficulty of assimilating with his whole being the word which God commissioned him to proclaim, and poured out his heart in his 'Confessions' (11.18-23; 12.1-6; 15.10-12, 15-21; 17.9-10, 14-18; 18.18-23; 20.7-10, 12, 11, 14-18), so this is Baruch's 'Confession'. He discovered that if he was to act as secretary to such a person as Jeremiah, he could not do it on a neutral basis, but must enter heart and soul into the meaning of what he was doing. And the cumulative effect of writing out Jeremiah's prophecies of destruction was to fill him with great distress.

God's word to Baruch is first of all to remind him that any distress which he feels is but a pale shadow of that which is in the heart of God himself. God has BUILT and PLANTED his people, and now for the sake of his love and faithfulness to them (31.3: I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you) he must BREAK them DOWN and PLUCK them UP. Even though this is the only thing to do, even though in the end it is the sure means of great blessing, it is a difficult and painful thing to do. And does Baruch compare his pain and sorrow with the pain and sorrow which is in the heart of God? (Compare the four I's

of v. 4 with the YOU of v. 5.) Let him think of the suffering love of God and wonder and adore and rejoice.

God's second word to Baruch is to remind him that to serve him means fulfilling his conditions. And his conditions are that Baruch must stop thinking of himself first; he must think of God first and take whatever comes for himself on that basis (cf. Matt. 6.33). This is Baruch's major crossroads of decision. Either he must give up the service of Jeremiah, in which case he is free to carve out a career for himself as he wishes; or he must go forward and accept whatever comes in the service of the mission that God has entrusted to Jeremiah. And in such a time of doom there may be a lot to accept. Baruch must count his life as it comes to him an unexpected and undeserved sign of God's mercy to him (cf. 21.9; 38.2; 39.18).

Bishop Hans Lilje, who has told the story of his imprisonment under the Nazi regime in Germany in 1944-45, has written that, once he had accepted the fact that the Nazis meant to kill him, each new day was for him an unexpected gift of the Divine Mercy. 'I did not know,' he says, 'that an existence that is still earthly and human could be so open to the world of God.'¹ It was to this living by the unexpected gifts of the Divine Mercy that Baruch knew himself called in the service of Jeremiah.

¹ *The Valley of the Shadow*, 1950, p. 88.

46.1-51.64

PART THREE

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON THE
NATIONS

THE TITLE TO THE COLLECTION OF PROPHECIES

46.1

This collection of prophecies raises two quite different questions: (1) Do these prophecies come from Jeremiah himself? (2) Do they illuminate God's dealings with the nations of the world?

In answer to the first, it must be said that there is no unanimity of critical opinion. John Skinner said: 'The mixed authorship of the foreign prophecies in chapters 46-51 is generally recognized; and the effort to disentangle a Jeremianic nucleus in the various oracles hardly repays the labour spent upon it.'¹ But since 1922 the tendency has been to attribute much of chapters 46-49 to Jeremiah with more confidence. There is no difficulty in general in attributing prophecies concerned with other nations to Jeremiah: his word to the ambassadors in King Zedekiah's reign (27.1-11) is of the first importance. It seems likely that there is material from Jeremiah in the prophecies against Egypt, and in those against all the peoples mentioned in chs. 47-49, with the exception of Damascus (which is not named in 25.15-38); though we should make allowance for the fact that the prophecies on Moab and Edom have been expanded by borrowings from other sources. There is general agreement that the long rambling prophecy against Babylon in chs. 50 and 51 presupposes a situation later than that of Jeremiah, and that no part of it comes from him. The prophecies against Egypt (46.2-28) are dated in the fourth year of King Jehoiakim (cf. 25.1; 36.1), and this may be intended to cover 47.1-49.33 as well; the note

¹ *Prophecy and Religion*, p. 239 n.

on the prophecy against Philistia, that it was before Pharaoh smote Gaza, must be wrong, since the power referred to is obviously Nebuchadrezzar. A different indication of time is given for the prophecy concerning Elam (49.34-39); the note mentions the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, when Babylon was beginning to show its expansive strength. The prophecies in chs. 50-51 are linked with the account of the casting of Jeremiah's genuine prophecy against Babylon into the river Euphrates in the fourth year of King Zedekiah (51.59-64).

But though it seems probable that some part at least of chs. 46-49 come from Jeremiah, it is difficult to think that we are here in as close touch with the working of Jeremiah's mind as we know it in other parts of the book. The prophecies themselves do not seem to bring us closely into touch with Jeremiah, and we have no biographical narrative from Baruch to help us out.

Beyond the question of authorship lies the question, 'How far do these prophecies illuminate God's dealing with the world?' We are right to judge these prophecies by Jeremiah's own standard that the author must have stood in the council of God and that he must give a morally transforming word (23.16-22). But when we do so we see that the extent to which they illuminate God's dealing with the world is disappointingly little.

In part what we have in these prophecies are descriptions of impending doom (46.3-9, 20-24; 47.2-3; 48.3-6; 49.28-33, 35, 38; 50.2-3, 8-10, 21-27, 35-38, 41-43; 51.1-4, 20-23, 27-33). While these are natural in a time of vast upheaval and calamity, and while we may be on the watch for the power of the images used, they do not take us far in the understanding of God and his purpose.

If we ask about the causes of that doom we may notice first the non-Jeremianic reason of retaliation for what has happened to Judah, which is most evident in the later prophecies against Babylon (48.27; 49.2, 12; 50.28; 51.5 f., 24,

34-37, 49-52, 54-57). There is some emphasis on faults of human outlook, not all of which can come from Jeremiah himself but which is intrinsically important (48.7, 13, 29; 49.4, 31). And if we try to distinguish the note of God's punishment—the application of the kind of standard which Jeremiah applied from within to his own people, then, even taking a risk that some of it may be coloured by the thought of retaliation, there is disappointingly little that we can set down (48.42; 50.15, 29-32, 45; 51.12-14).

It must also be said that there are some passages, and some of them in the midst of material that may come from Jeremiah, which seem to express an offensive delight in destruction for its own sake (46.10; 47.6 f.; 48.10; 50.21, 26).

We must also note that there are four passages which promise restoration—for Egypt, for Moab, for Ammon and for Elam (46.26; 48.47; 49.6, 39). Of these the one concerning Egypt seems to be that unintelligent stopping of prophecy in mid-flight that we have met before (4.27; 5.10, 18; 30.10 f.). But the prophecies in connection with Moab, Ammon and Elam seem to add the genuine and important insight, which, however, urgently needs elaboration, that God's purpose for the nations is not one of continual destruction but one of peace, in fellowship with himself and with one another.

The one prophecy to which attention may particularly be drawn is 48.11-13, where Jeremiah seems to apply to Moab some of his understanding of God's dealing with Judah. Under the pressure of the disturbance of her long-enjoyed security, Moab will discover that the foundations of her existence do not go deep enough. Here is her opportunity to turn to the living God.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON JUDAH'S
GREAT SOUTHERN NEIGHBOUR,
EGYPT
46.2-28

NEBUCHADREZZAR'S VICTORY AT
CARCHEMISH
46.2-12

There is no question about the decisive importance of Nebuchadrezzar's victory at Carchemish. It transferred the suzerainty over the nations from Egypt to Babylon. For its impact on the life of Jeremiah see the comment on 36.1-32.

The poem is a description of the disaster that is coming on Egypt. TERROR ON EVERY SIDE (cf. 6.25; 20.3, 10; 49.29) now strikes upon—the confident and advancing Egyptian army! Egypt's surging power is deeply hurt at the SACRIFICE BY THE RIVER EUPHRATES. And there is no healing for her.

10. A horrible verse, whoever wrote it. Skinner speaks of the 'gloating satisfaction' displayed in it, which he refuses to attribute to Jeremiah; he insists that it must come from somebody like Nahum. For other expressions of this offensive thought see Zeph. 1.7; Isa. 34.5-7; 63.1-6; Ezek. 39.17-20.

EGYPT IS HELPLESS UNDER ATTACK FROM
THE NORTH
(BUT SHE WILL AFTERWARDS BE
INHABITED)
46.13-26

Jeremiah believed not only that Nebuchadrezzar had wrested the suzerainty over the nations from Egypt's grasp.

but also that he would conquer Egypt itself (cf. 43.8-13). Here vv. 14-24 are a poem on this theme, while vv. 25 f. are a prose explanation. In both poetry and prose, such conquest is according to God's will; see cf. v. 15, BECAUSE THE LORD THRUST HIM DOWN.

The cities of Egypt must be prepared for conquest (for the names see comment on 43.7; 44.1). Egypt's bull has not been able to stand (read v. 15 with RSV, WHY HAS APIS FLED? WHY DID NOT YOUR BULL STAND?). Pharaoh's hour has gone by. Through a mighty enemy the Egyptians will be exiled. Egypt is a BEAUTIFUL HEIFER but has been stung by a GADFLY. Her HIRED SOLDIERS are like cowardly CALVES. Egypt is like a snake driven out of a forest by woodcutters. The enemy from the north are like locusts, and will put Egypt to shame.

26b. See the end of the comment on v.1.

IN CONTRAST GOD WILL SAVE JACOB
46.27-28

These verses, which we have met at 30.10-11 (see the comment), are in fact not very encouraging, but they are inserted here by a later editor to contrast God's purpose for Israel with the prophecy against Egypt.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON JUDAH'S SMALLER NEIGHBOURS

47.1-49.33

RELENTLESS DESTRUCTION IS COMING ON THE PHILISTINES

47.1-7

This prophecy is a description of the judgment which is coming from the north upon the cities of Philistia. It shows no dependence on similar prophecies (see Amos 1.6-8; Isa. 14.28-31; Ezek. 25.15-17; Zeph. 2.4-7).

Waters from the north are drowning Philistia. The might of Babylon causes fathers to forget their children. Tyre and Sidon are bereft of their allies. Those who come from Crete (Caphtor, cf. Amos 9.7) and are descended from the Anakim, the giants who used to live in Palestine, are being destroyed.

5. For AV, WITH THE REMNANT OF THEIR VALLEY, read, with RSV, O REMNANT OF THE ANAKIM, and cf. Josh. 11. 21 f.; Num. 13.22, 28, 33.

Baldness

This, like self-mutilation, is a sign of mourning (cf. 16.6; 41.5; 48.37; it is forbidden in Deut. 14.1).

Gaza

Herodotus (II 159) says that after the battle of Megiddo, where Josiah was killed (II Kings 23.29), Pharaoh Neco overran Kadytis, which is usually identified with Gaza. This accounts for the misleading attribution of date in v. 1 (see comment on 46.1).

5-7. The cry of the unhappy Philistines is silenced by the thought that the work of destruction is God's appointment: how can his sword be quiet when he has GIVEN IT A CHARGE?

6-7. These are really horrible verses. J. A. Bewer has said, 'There is no trace of hatred or malicious joy in this poem.' Maybe not, but we have a sense of delight in destruction for its own sake, and the unfortunate suggestion that in God's service there is no restriction on slaughter. These verses and 48.10 may be the source of the vision of Judas Maccabeus that Jeremiah gave him a golden sword (II Macc. 15.15 f.).

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON MOAB

48.1-47

This collection of prophecies concerning Moab is remarkable for its comparative length among the other prophecies in chs. 46-49, the large number of towns mentioned, and the borrowing from other parts of the Old Testament. Two incidents are specially relevant to any prophecy Jeremiah himself may have uttered in connection with Moab. One is the fact that Moab joined in the marauding bands which Nebuchadnezzar sent in 602 after the revolt of Jehoiakim (see II Kings 24.2 and Jeremiah's prophecy in 12.7-13); the other is that Moab joined in the consultation about a possible revolt against Babylon early in Zedekiah's reign (27.1-11). For other prophecies against Moab see Amos 2.1-3; Zeph. 2.8-11; Ezek. 25.8-11; Isa. 15-16; 25.10-12; also Deut. 23.3; Pss. 60.8; 83.6 f.; 108.9; for relations between Moab and Israel see Gen. 19.30-38; Num. 22-24; II Kings 3.4-27. We may, for convenience, divide the chapter into the main collection of prophecies (vv. 1-28), and material dependent on other sources (vv. 29-46).

THE DEVASTATION OF MOAB
48.1-9

This section is a description of how Moab will be laid waste, with specification of the main towns.

Heshbon

One of the principal towns (cf. v. 34 and 49.3), which once captured has been made the headquarters of the enemy for further attacks.

Madmen

Here there is some allusion which is lost to us.

5. Borrowed from Isa. 15.5—see the borrowings from Isa. 15 and 16 in vv. 29-46.

6. Instead of AV, *THE HEATH*, read, with RSV, *A WILD ASS*. We have seen at 14.6 that the wild asses could subsist on almost nothing.

7. This verse gives a profound reason for Moab's downfall—false security in material things, without freedom to learn at the hands of the living God from the changing discipline of life. For Christian and non-Christian, for nation and individual, the choice between God and mammon (Matt. 6.24) is the crucial choice. But it is hard in any age to admit that 'a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions' (Luke 12.15).

NO SLACKNESS IN GOD'S WORK OF
DESTRUCTION
48.10

A. S. Peake comments on this verse, 'This bloodthirsty verse is surely not Jeremiah's. It was Hildebrand's (i.e. Pope Gregory VII's) favourite quotation.' This is a most perverse use of Scripture by a Christian. We must discriminate among prophecies by the standards the prophets themselves set (cf. 23.16-22).

INSTEAD OF SECURITY, EMPTINESS
THROUGH FALSE CONFIDENCE
48.11-13

Moab, famous for its wine, and with a more settled history than Judah, is like a rich wine whose sediment is undisturbed. According to the quality of the wine this can be both good (Isa. 25.6) or bad (Zeph. 1.12). But now there are coming *TILTERS WHO WILL TILT HIM* (RSV), empty his 'casks' (Moffatt) and break his *JARS* (RSV). Then, in the day of upheaval and testing, Moab will find Chemosh its national god (see vv. 13, 46; Num. 21.29; I Kings 11.7, 33; II Kings 23.13) wanting, just as Israel has placed false trust in Bethel (cf. Amos 5.5). This applies to anything less than the living God, and it includes the false trust 'in the house of the Lord', the temple (7.1-15; 26.1-6). We are here very near to Jeremiah's central concern, that in the time of real testing only trust in the living God is of any use at all.

MOAB IS LAID WASTE
48.14-20

This is a description of the breaking of Moab's power. The choicest of Moab's young men have gone down to slaughter.

The HEROES AND MIGHTY MEN OF WAR have not been able to prevent it, and the MIGHTY SCEPTRE and the GLORIOUS STAFF have not been strong enough. The ground is PARCHED for want of attention; the STRONGHOLDS are no more; and the fugitives can only tell the sad story.

JUDGMENT ON THE CITIES OF MOAB
48.21-25, 28

This listing of the cities of Moab, to make clearer the destruction that has taken place, comes from a later time. The essential situation is that of vv. 14-20, that the strength of Moab is no more. The only thing to do is to leave the cities and live precariously like wild doves that dare to nest in the very sides of a mountainous gorge (cf. the image of the wild ass, v. 6).

MOAB, TOO, SHALL BE HELD IN DERISION
48.26-27

These verses break the connection between vv. 25, 28. They are also un-Jeremianic in stressing the motive of retaliation for what has happened to Israel. The verses pick up the unpleasant image of the consequences of drinking the cup of God's wrath (cf. 25.27-29). That Moab MAGNIFIED HIMSELF AGAINST THE LORD could be a fruitful thought, and it probably means 'set himself against the power of Babylon God's appointed agent' (cf. 27.6 and see v. 42). Moab, the derider of others, is now itself derided. The fact of DERISION, and WAGGING THE HEAD as a sign of it, is a verbal link between this verse and the story of the Cross (Mark 15.29).

(MATERIAL DEPENDENT ON OTHER SOURCES)
48.29-46

In this section the borrowing from other and later sources is very considerable. The main source from which borrowing is made is Isa. 16.6-11 and 15.2-7. The whole passage, Isa. 15.1-16.14, is more natural and better ordered than the extracts given here (v. 29 comes from Isa. 16.6; vv. 31-33 from Isa. 16.7-10; v. 34 from Isa. 15.4-6; v. 36 from Isa. 16.11; 15.5; vv. 37 f. from Isa. 15.2-3). We must also note that vv. 40, 41b (with the change of name of Moab for Edom) are the same as 49.22 where the passage is likely to be original. Finally vv. 43 f. are borrowed from Isa. 24.17 f., and vv. 45 f. from Num. 21.28 f.; 24.17. (In v. 46 the captivity is described in the passive to avoid ascribing it to the power of Chemosh, as in Num. 21.29.) With this extensive borrowing there is little likelihood that much comes from Jeremiah.

THE PRIDE OF MOAB
48.29-33

The two main thoughts in these verses are the pride of Moab (which is a valid reason for expecting disaster) and the destruction of the vineyards for which Moab was famous. The joy that has been taken away is vividly portrayed.

UNHAPPY MOAB
48.34-39

This passage is a dirge specifying the parts of Moab which are desolate, the ending of worship, and the prevalence of mourning as shown by the playing of the flute, and by the evidence of shaved heads, mutilation and sackcloth (cf. 47.5).

Moab is like a broken 'jar' (Knox) FOR WHICH NO ONE CARES—contrast the thought of the jar that was remade as it seemed good to the potter (18.4). So Moab has become an object of DERISION AND HORROR.

DESTRUCTION AND CAPTIVITY COME TO
MOAB
48.40-46

40-42. The conquering power of the enemy is pictured as AN EAGLE, the distress of the army as akin to child-birth (cf. 4.31; 6.24; 13.21; 22.23; 30.6; 50.43), and the reason given (as in v. 26) is that HE MAGNIFIED HIMSELF AGAINST THE LORD. How much we need that reason expanded and interpreted! How does a nation, not brought to faith in the living God, yet order its life in obedience to him, how does it come to the point of acknowledging him by whom it lives, and what are the most serious ways in which a nation disobeys him?

43-44. Whatever the inhabitants of Moab do, disaster in some form (TERROR, PIT AND SNARE) looms ahead.

45-46. It is no use fleeing south from Heshbon, because south of Heshbon (cf. v. 2) is even worse devastation. The SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF Moab are TAKEN INTO CAPTIVITY.

GOD WILL AFTERWARDS RESTORE MOAB
48.47

(Cf. 12.15 and 49.6, 39.) Here again is something that needs expanding and interpreting. God's purpose towards the nations is not that they should be destroyed, but that they should live in peace and fellowship with one another. This word of restoration of *Moab* is as necessary as the word of

Amos condemning *Israel* (Amos 2.6-16), and in this setting as unexpected. We can be grateful to the unknown author whose vision and compassion were so great.

DESOLATION AND FEAR WILL COME
TO USURPING AND SELF-CONFIDENT
AMMON (BUT AFTERWARDS
RESTORATION WILL FOLLOW)
49.1-6

This prophecy may have preceded that of 48.1-47, to keep the geographical sequence from north to south—Ammon, Moab, Edom. The two incidents mentioned in connection with Moab (ch. 48), the marauding bands and the consultation about revolt, apply also to Ammon. In addition there is the fact that when some of the Israelite tribes were taken into captivity by Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria, in 734-732 BC (II Kings 15.29), the Ammonites occupied Israelite territory east of the river Jordan. The dispute between Israel and Ammon over territory is, of course, an old story (see Gen. 19.30-38; Judg. 11; I Sam. 11; II Sam. 10.1-11.1; 12.26-31). For other prophecies see Amos 1.13-15 (note the complaint, 'that they might enlarge their border'); Zeph. 2.8-11; Ezek. 21.28-32; 25.1-7.

Ammon has dispossessed Israel of Gilead or Gad, but war will make it a DESOLATE MOUND and Israel will recover her territory. Ammon (personified by her god MILCOM, RSV, vv. 1, 3 [AV, THEIR KING]; I Kings 11.5, 33; II Kings 23.13) will go into exile. She, like Moab (48.7) has TRUSTED IN HER TREASURES to give her security; but now God is bringing TERROR upon her (cf. 6.25; 20.3, 10; 46.5; 49.29) and no one will be able to bring the fugitives together.

2-6. Rabbah

The capital of Ammon. HESHBON was a Moabite city

(cf. 48.2, 34, 45) and Ai is not known as an Ammonite town. There is some uncertainty here. In spite of the dispute over territory, and the criticism of Ammon as a faithless daughter, trusting in her treasures and not on the watch for the living God, the tone of this prophecy is curiously gentle. It is a lament over the destruction of ordered human living. The enemy is not named, but it is presumably Babylon. The prophecy ends happily with another promise of restoration (see 48.47; 49.39; 12.15). To see a contradiction between this and v. 2 is pedantry. However Israel and Ammon settled their territorial disputes, they both needed to live in peace and quietness together.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON EDMO 49.7-22

Though Israel and Edom were akin (see Gen. 25.19-33.17; Deut. 23.7 f.) this did not prevent a history of antagonism between them (see Num. 20.14-21; II Sam. 8.13 f.; I Kings 9.26-28; 11.15-16; II Kings 8.20-22; 14.7). But the real bitterness came after the fall of Jerusalem, when Edom took advantage of the opportunity and occupied southern Judah (see Ps. 137.7; Lam. 4.21; Obad. vv. 11-14; Mal. 1.2-4; Joel 3.19; Isa. 34.5-7; 63.1-6; Ezek. 25.12-14; 35.1-15; Amos 9.12). W. O. E. Oesterley has written, 'Nothing more embittered the patriotic Jew, who had always ruled over and despised these Edomites with whom [the Jews] were racially connected, than the thought of how in the day of Jerusalem's fall they had egged on the enemy with malicious glee; that bitterness is reflected again and again.'¹ What is remarkable about this collection is that with all its borrowings, and the harshness of the destruction which it prophesies, it does not reflect that resentful antagonism. With vv. 9-10a compare Obad. vv. 5-6 and

¹ *History of Israel II*, p. 341.

with vv. 14-16 compare Obad. vv. 1-4. Notice that the account of what Edom did after the fall of Jerusalem (Obad. vv. 11-14) is not included in these borrowings. Verses 12-13 represent a conviction alien to that of Jeremiah. Verse 17 is adapted from 19.8; v. 18 is found also in 50.40; vv. 19-21 are adapted from 50.44-46, where they are more in place. While the earth might tremble at the fall of Babylon it would hardly do so at the fall of Edom. Verse 22, which also appears in the collection of prophecies on Moab (48.40, 41b) is right for Edom. Verses 7-11, 22 seem to represent what is possibly the basis of Jeremiah's prophecy if he gave one. Note that if Jeremiah prophesied that Edom too would be engulfed in the upheaval caused by the triumph of Babylon, he was quite wrong. Edom had sent her ambassador to consider with others revolt against Babylon (27.3), but afterwards changed her mind, to her great advantage.

GOD WILL STRIP ESAU BARE 49.7-11

This is a lament over the destruction of Edom. Have they no wisdom to see that destruction is impending? No concealment is possible. Edom is destroyed and his orphans and widows must be left to God's mercy.

IF THE INNOCENT MUST DRINK THE CUP SO MUST THE GUILTY 49.12-13

These verses cannot be from Jeremiah, because it is unthinkable that Jeremiah would have said that Judah did not deserve to drink the cup of God's wrath (for the image see 25.15-16), or that the calamity coming upon Edom was retaliation for what he had done to God's people. The words are an

even more extreme development of 25.27-29. The words, I HAVE SWORN BY MYSELF (cf. 22.5 and 51.14), show that the more solemn the oath the more liable is it to abuse (see Matt. 5.33-37). The sense of Edom's guilt and the prophecy that its capital Bozrah shall become A HORROR, A TAUNT, A WASTE AND A CURSE reflect no doubt the later situation after the fall of Jerusalem.

GOD WILL BRING DOWN EDM FROM HER
EAGLE'S NEST
49.14-16

This poem is borrowed from Obad. 1-4 and represents a later situation than that of Jeremiah. The nations are summoned to fight against Edom, presumably because of her treatment of Judah, and she will be made small and despised. The pride of Edom is the cause of her downfall (cf. 48.7, 29; 49.4). Her inaccessible rocky heights do not take her out of the reach of God's purposes (cf. Ps. 139.7-12).

THE HORROR OF EDM'S FATE
49.17-22

This prose passage contains three elements.

17-18. These verses, borrowed from 19.8 and 50.40, prophesy the complete overthrow of Edom. The NEIGHBOUR CITIES to Sodom and Gomorrah are Admah and Zeboim (see Gen. 10.19; 14.2, 8; Deut. 29.23; Hos. 11.8).

19-21. These, which are more in place at 50.44-46, picture the enemy as a lion (cf. 4.7) coming in search of prey. No ruler CAN STAND against God's purpose of destruction. EVEN THE

LITTLE ONES will be destroyed. The earth will tremble at their fall and the cry of wailing be heard AT THE RED SEA. This is more appropriate to Babylon.

22. This verse, which is quite appropriate to Edom, and may come from Jeremiah, speaks of the invader like an eagle surmounting Bozrah's rocky heights (cf. v. 16); the time of agony for Edom's soldiers will be like the pains of child-birth (cf. 4.31; 6.24; 13.21; 22.23; 30.6; 50.43).

DAMASCUS IS FORSAKEN
49.23-27

This prophecy breaks any geographical sequence; it is not named in the list of nations in 25.17-26, and in any case is almost perfunctory. The three Syrian towns, Damascus, Hamath and Arpad were all conquered by Assyria (cf. Isa. 10.9; II Kings 18.34; 19.13). It may perhaps be worth noting that the only conspirators of ch. 27 unmentioned are Tyre and Sidon, and that this in a broad sense fills the gap.

23-25. The one idea of this, the main prophecy, is that the Syrian cities are overcome with fear (for NOT LEFT, AV, read FORSAKEN, RSV.).

26-27. To this has been added, by borrowings, the other thought of devastation by war. Verse 26 is taken from 50.30 where the THEREFORE and IN THAT DAY are in place as they are not here. Verse 27 is borrowed from Amos' prophecy against Damascus (Amos 1.4, cf. 1.14). Benhadad is a common name for the kings of Damascus (I Kings 15.18, 20; II Kings 13.24). As the prophecy stands it is represented as another indication of the wide sweep of the expanding power of Babylon.

TERROR FOR KEDAR AND HAZOR 49.28-33

Babylon's power (v. 28) will extend not only to Ammon, Moab and Edom, but southwards to Arabia. KEDAR is a tribe and HAZOR may be a collective name for the area in which they lived. These prophecies may be intended to cover the same ground as the groups specified in 25.23 f. Their practice of CUTTING THE CORNERS OF THEIR HAIR (v. 32; AV. THAT ARE IN THE UTMOST CORNERS) has been considered at 9.25 f.

29. Terror on every side

A favourite word of Jeremiah's (see 6.25; 20.3, 10; 46.5).

30-31. These verses are very similar to Ezek. 38.10-11, by which they may be influenced. It is here that any trace of reason for criticism of the Arab tribes occurs in the phrase THAT DWELLS SECURELY (AV WITHOUT CARE). As Moab trusted in his strongholds and treasures (48.7), and as Ammon also trusted in her treasures (49.4), so the Arabian tribes trust that their free way of life without GATES OR BARS has so far rendered them immune from attack. But they too must renounce their false security and accept life at the hands of God.

33. An application to the territory of Hazor of the prophecy against Judah in 9.11.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ELAM BEYOND BABYLON

(At the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah)
49.34-39

God will break the bow of Elam (but afterwards restore them). This prophecy and its dating may well be historical. Elam was an ancient kingdom (cf. Gen. 14.1) 200 miles east of Babylonia (that is, on the farther side from Judah and north of Persia). Ezekiel has a prophecy of its warriors going down to Sheol with the uncircumcised warriors of Assyria, Meshech and Tubal (Ezek. 32.17-32). It was famous for its archers (Isa. 22.6). It was later the nucleus of the Persian empire (cf. Dan. 8.2; Neh. 1.1). It was mentioned among the list of nations at 25.25.

If we ask why Jeremiah should be interested in such a distant kingdom, the answer seems to be that, if in the establishment of its power Babylon had trouble with Elam, the political leaders of Judah and neighbouring countries might well have thought it a restraint on Babylon's power to deal with them. If so, Jeremiah may have uttered this prophecy to make sure that they had no illusions that they could escape from Babylon's power.

The message of the prophecy is the simple one of God's hostility towards Elam—to break their bow, to scatter them to the four winds, to terrify them and destroy them, setting up his throne in Elam. God's power reaches even to so distant a kingdom, and he has no intention of letting Elam disturb his plans that Babylon should rule the world. Jeremiah's political insight was, of course, vindicated by events.

And once again we have the addition of the purpose of restoration, as in 48.47; 49.6. Even if this is prophecy after the event it is welcome. God's primary purpose is to build and to plant rather than to pull up and to break down (cf. 1.10 and John 3.17).

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON JUDAH'S GREAT NORTHERN NEIGHBOUR BABYLON

50.1-51.58

The prophecies in 50.1-51.58 are 'a loose collection of sayings with many repetitions and without recognizable connection or sequence of thought' (Weiser). This in itself stamps them as not coming from the mind of Jeremiah. But also they presuppose an entirely different situation from that of his lifetime. The time is shortly before 538 BC, when Cyrus, King of Persia, captured—though he did not destroy—the city of Babylon (cf. Isa. 44.25; 45.1). (Information about the capture of Babylon by Cyrus comes to us from inscriptions containing the chronicle of the last kings of Babylon, and also from the cylinder of Cyrus himself.) The compiler is impatient for the overthrow of Babylon and has to reassure his hearers that the prophecies are in fact going to be fulfilled (51.46). The destruction of Babylon is about to take place (50.2 f., 8-10; 51.1 f., 41-44) instead of being seventy years distant (27.7; 29.10), and there is no thought that Babylon has been an instrument in God's hand for the punishment of his unworthy people; he is rather thought of as taking vengeance for the desecration of his temple (50.28; 51.11); and the situation of the exiles seems to be after the fall of Jerusalem (50.4 f.; 51.34). In addition, the chapters show a literary dependence on other parts of Jeremiah (50.41-43 is taken from 6.22-24 and 51.15-19 from 10.12-16) and on other parts of the Old Testament. (With 50.40 cf. Isa. 13.19-22; 34.11-17; with 51.58b cf. Hab. 2.13; and see Isa. 13.2-14.23; 21.1-9; 40-55.)

Because of the repetitions and absence of order it may be

helpful to consider the contents of the prophecies in terms of grouping passages under main themes. It will be noted how much, particularly in ch. 51, falls under the head of retaliation for Israel, which is so alien to the genuine thought of Jeremiah, and how little can be found to counterbalance that side by an understanding that if disaster comes to Babylon it is the result of a wrong relationship between her and God.

**ISRAEL AND JUDAH ARE LIKE HUNTED
SHEEP, BUT BABYLON IS ABOUT
TO FALL
50.1-46**

**ISRAEL AND JUDAH ARE LIKE HUNTED SHEEP
BUT THEIR REDEEMER IS STRONG
50.4-7, 17-20, 33-34**

Three passages in ch. 50 look towards the return of God's people to their home. Of these the first is the most significant, though even that does not go very deep.

4-7. The people COME . . . WEeping to SEEK THEIR GOD. Weeping implies sorrow, but does it imply repentance? They ASK THE WAY TO JERUSALEM to join themselves in an unforgettable EVERLASTING COVENANT. But the covenant which God has made with them is still in force, and their exile is a strong indication of it; is the writer aware of this, and is this an attempt to fulfil Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (31.31-34)? We should have more assurance of this if v. 5b read 'which this time we will not forget'. God's people are like sheep led astray (Jeremiah had stronger words to say; cf. 2.20-37), and the expression of guilt is put not into their own mouths but into the mouths of their enemies. But a

genuine acknowledgment of the Lord as their TRUE HABITATION and THE HOPE OF THEIR FATHERS could be the beginning of that turning to him in which there is renewal and life (cf. 4.1 f.).

17-20. The second passage is shallower. Just as God brought retribution on Assyria, so he will on Babylon. Israel will be restored to the delights and comforts of her own land, and there will be no sin in Israel and Judah. But this is too easy a message. It says, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace (cf. 8.11). Man's sin is not so easily dismissed, as Jeremiah knew (cf. 13.23; 17.9). Restoration must go deeper if it is to be truly restoration.

33-34. God is STRONG to deliver his people from the captivity from which the people of Babylon refuse to release them. The word REDEEMER in the Old Testament has not the full Christian meaning that it has in the New Testament (see Rom. 3.24; 8.23; I Cor. 1.30; Eph. 1.7; Col. 1.14), but it began the process of acquiring it by the fact that it is used of God fifteen times in Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa. 41.14; 43.14; 44.6; 47.4; 48.17; 49.7; 54.5). The Hebrew word (*gō'ēl*) is used of a man 'redeeming' the property of a relation who has become poor, as Jeremiah himself did (32.6-15). But there is no indication in this short prophecy of anything more than confidence that God will in fact restore his people.

**THE ENEMY FROM THE NORTH
50.2-3, 8-10, 21-27, 35-38, 41-43**

For Babylon, as for Judah, the enemy comes from the north. Note the mention of the Medes in 51.11, 28. Much of the two chapters is occupied with descriptions of the coming of the enemy.

2-3. Bel and Merodach

Babylonian deities; Merodach was known as Marduk. Babylon will be made desolate by the enemy from the north.

8-10. The exiles are exhorted to fly from Babylon (cf. 51.6; Isa. 48.20) in great haste without regard for anyone else (like HE-GOATS pushing to the front of THE FLOCK), because nations from the north will plunder Babylon.

21-27. The enemy from the north is exhorted to destroy the different districts of Babylonia (whose names by slight distortion mean appropriately 'double rebellion' and 'punishment'). Babylon, THE HAMMER OF THE WHOLE EARTH (cf. 51.20-23) is broken. Babylon is CAUGHT in a SNARE.

25. This is the result of God's WRATH (cf. v. 27)—this is stated without any illumination of the reason why God is thought to be angry with Babylon. The enemy from the north is further exhorted to OPEN HER GRANARIES and (using the thought of HEAPS OF GRAIN in a different way) to PILE HER UP for destruction and finally to SLAUGHTER all her soldiers (BULLS) (cf. 48.15; 51.40).

35-38. These verses are a poetic rhapsody on the SWORD and the DROUGHT that will destroy Babylon.

41-43. These verses are an adaptation of the picture of the enemy from the north, given in 6.22-24, to apply to Babylon.

THE DESOLATION OF BABYLON
50.11-13, 39-40

11-13. Babylon shall become A WILDERNESS DRY AND DESERT, AN UTTER DESOLATION. With v. 13 cf. 18.16; 19.8; 25.9, 11; 49.17. With the thought of Babylon's desolation there is com-

bined the thought of retaliation for Israel, because Babylon is thought of as a PLUNDERER of God's HERITAGE (contrast 27.5-7) against whom the wrath of God is about to break.

39-40. The desolation of Babylon is also pictured here as one of perpetual lack of habitation—like Sodom and Gomorrah and Admah and Zeboim (cf. 49.17 f.; Isa. 13.19-22; 34.11-17).

RETALIATION FOR ISRAEL
50.28

We have already seen this idea in v. 11 where the Babylonians are described by God as PLUNDERERS OF MY HERITAGE. It takes a much larger place in ch. 51 than in this chapter (see 51. 5 f., 10 f., 24, 34-37, 49-53, 54-57). But it is clearly to be seen when it is said that the destruction of Babylon will be proclaimed in Jerusalem as God's VENGEANCE FOR HIS TEMPLE (which was burnt down after the fall of Jerusalem, see 52.13; cf. 39.8). When we think of how Jeremiah declared that the temple would be destroyed as a punishment for Judah's sin (7.1-15), we realize how far some of those who cherished his words were from sharing his spirit (cf. Matt. 23.29 f.).

THE PUNISHMENT OF GOD
50.14-16, 29-32

The dividing line may be narrow between the thought of disaster coming to a foreign power because it has maltreated God's people, and the thought that it has come because of a wrong relation to God made plain in political unwisdom and religious emptiness and lack of faithfulness. But it is important to maintain the distinction. It is probable that these two passages fall on the negative rather than the positive side of the dividing line, yet they are placed here as evidence of some

endeavour to seek after genuine illumination from these prophecies.

14-16. Babylon HAS SINNED AGAINST THE LORD—this is his VENGEANCE. We need more interpretation of this thought before it becomes truly illuminating. DO TO HER AS SHE HAS DONE. Does this mean that retribution has come to Babylon by the moral standards by which she herself lived (cf. Matt. 7.1-2)? Or does it mean, as unhappily is more likely, 'This is where Israel gets her own back'?

29-32. The same comment applies to vv. 29-30. If Babylon has in deed and truth PROUDLY DEFIED THE LORD, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, that is a good reason for disaster coming upon her. But what is the evidence of such defiance? The fall of Jerusalem? But Jeremiah had reiterated to King Zedekiah that Babylon was acting in accordance with God's will (see 37.7-10; 38.18).

30. This is also found at 49.26, but is more in place here.

31-32 are adaptations to Babylon of 21.13-14. Here the pride of Babylon is stressed as a reason for her stumbling and being burnt up, which at least contains the germ of an illuminating insight.

THE FALL OF BABYLON 50.44-46

These verses have appeared before, at 49.19-21, with Edom substituted for Babylon, but they are more suitable here. Here is the enemy from the north coming as A LION . . . AGAINST A SHEEP-FOLD. What ruler—even the King of Babylon—can stand against the purposes of the everlasting God? But that Babylon should be destroyed will be found appalling.

46. This verse is particularly appropriate. AT THE SOUND OF THE CAPTURE OF BABYLON THE EARTH SHALL TREMBLE, AND HER CRY SHALL BE HEARD, not this time at the Red Sea (49.21), but AMONG THE NATIONS which she has held in subjection.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD AND THE CERTAINTY OF THE FALL OF BABYLON 51.1-58

This section contains the same themes as ch. 50, though the proportions are different, and there is here, as there, one theme distinct from the rest. There it was the thought that Israel and Judah are like hunted sheep. Here it is a brief mention of the greatness of God.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD 51.15-19

These verses have been found already at 10.12-16 as part of the section 10.1-16 on the powerlessness of idols. They do not come from Jeremiah and are an intrusion there—they are also an intrusion here, though they belong better to this later time. But the contrast between the greatness of God and the stupidity of man is in this sense relevant to the impending doom of Babylon, that the power of Babylon cannot intimidate him WHO MADE THE EARTH BY HIS POWER, or prevent him from carrying out his purposes.

THE ENEMY FROM THE NORTH 51.1-4, 20-23, 27-33

There are three descriptions of the enemy from the north:

1-4. The enemy is a winnowing destroyer that will not spare Babylon.

1. the inhabitants of Chaldea

RSV translates thus, and has a marginal comment, 'Heb. *Leb-qamai*, a cipher for Chaldea.' The Hebrew means literally 'the heart of those who rise up against me' and is put for Chaldea by the cipher *athbash* which reads Sheshach for Babylon (see 25.26; 51.41). We do not know what purpose the use of such a cipher served.

winnowers

AV, FANNERS. This image for the enemy's action we have met earlier (4.11; 15.1)

3. RSV reads, LET NOT THE ARCHER BEND HIS BOW, AND LET HIM NOT STAND UP IN HIS COAT OF MAIL. The text is corrupt, and we should either omit the negatives or add a word meaning 'grow weary in'. Destruction is coming to Babylon.

20-23. Cyrus, King of Persia, is addressed as the HAMMER with which God is breaking up all types of human life and occupation. (cf. the thought of Babylon itself as God's hammer—50.23). This is a vivid picture of the power of the enemy from the north.

27-33. A description of the attack on Babylon. First, three peoples north of Babylonia conquered by the Medes in the sixth century are summoned to take part with the Medes in the conquest. Next there is a clear-cut impression of the pain of the land, the helplessness of the soldiers, the King of Babylon listening to reports each gloomier than the last—the ways into the city are open, the outer defences are burnt, and his soldiers have lost control both of the situation and of themselves. Finally, Babylon is compared to a harvest THRESHING-FLOOR (cf. 50.26) about to be trodden soon.

THE DESOLATION OF BABYLON
51.7-9, 25-26, 38-40, 45-48

7-9. A dirge over Babylon's fall for which no healing can be found. The verses give a new turn to the image of God's cup (25.15-16). Here it is not the cup of God's wrath, but a GOLDEN CUP of power and splendour, which is yet in God's hand because it is by God's permission that Babylon holds its power. This power and splendour the nations covet though it does them harm (cf. Rev. 17.4; 18.6). Suddenly it is smashed. Nothing can be done about it, because it is God's judgment that the rule of Babylon is now over.

25-26. These verses were written by someone who had never been to Babylon, set in the midst of a great plain, but the metaphor of a mountain is appropriate to Babylon's power (cf. 46.18). Babylon, so the wish or curse goes, shall be BURNT up, and be A PERPETUAL WASTE. Happily, life is sometimes more merciful than men's hatreds.

38-40. The Babylonians are pictured as LIONS' WHELPS roaring for their food (cf. Ps. 104.21). God will indeed give them a feast, but the result will not be their usual drunken sleep from which they wake—the drunken sleep which the cup of God's wrath produces will be the sleep of death.

40. like lambs to the slaughter

Either this should come before the climax or else it is an addition.

45-48. An appeal to leave Babylon before the disaster comes. Even if there are delays, the destruction of Babylon is certain. Her gods will be helpless to protect her. Heaven and earth shall rejoice when Babylon is destroyed by the enemy that comes from the north.

RETALIATION FOR ISRAEL
51.5-6, 10, 11, 24, 34-37, 49-53, 54-57

The thought of retaliation for what has happened to God's people—so alien to Jeremiah—takes an even larger place in this chapter than in ch. 50.

5-6. The first of these verses makes the valid point that God has not FORSAKEN ISRAEL AND JUDAH, but this is linked with the thought that Babylon (RSV, THE LAND OF THE CHALDEANS, as against AV, THEIR LAND) IS FULL OF GUILT AGAINST THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL. This takes no account of Jeremiah's teaching about 'Nebuchadrezzar my servant' (27.6). The second adds the thought that it is not good to be in Babylon in the time of God's PUNISHMENT, VENGEANCE, REQUITAL. God—and Judah—will get their own back on what Babylon has wickedly done to his people.

10. Here the thought is expressed that the fall of Babylon is Judah's VINDICATION (RSV). It is clear that Jeremiah's own thought, that the reality of God's covenant with Judah was 'vindicated' in the fall of *Jerusalem*, would have been unintelligible to the writer.

11. This verse names the enemy from the north as the Medes and indicates that the destruction of Babylon will be God's VENGEANCE FOR HIS TEMPLE (see 50.28).

24. It is the evil done in Jerusalem that is specified as the cause of God's requital.

34-37. Injuries are specifically laid at the door of Nebuchadrezzar who has DEVoured, CRUSHED, emptied, SWALLOWED and RINSED OUT Judah, and for that violence against THE INHABITANT OF ZION God's vengeance will dry up the river

Euphrates and make Babylon a ruin (in terms earlier applied to Judah and Jerusalem; see 9.11; 10.22; 18.16).

49-53. As others have died because of Babylon, now BABYLON MUST FALL, because of those they have killed in Israel. The logic is uncertain, but the sentiment is clear. The Jewish exiles urged to return argue that they are too ashamed to do so because the temple has been desecrated by foreigners. (It was not such desecration that troubled Jeremiah, but the desecration of unworthy worship.) The promise given is that the shame will be taken away when Babylon is defeated and her own gods are put to shame. God's destruction is inescapable, however high Babylon climbs (cf. v. 25).

54-57. A vivid description of the tumult of the destruction of Babylon. The enemy sweeps into Babylon like tidal waves (cf. v. 42), and the roar which they make drowns the noise of the mighty city. This is God's doing, his RECOMPENSE and requital for Judah. Babylon's leaders will be driven by drunkenness into PERPETUAL SLEEP (cf. v. 39).

THE PUNISHMENT OF GOD
51.12-14

If now in the midst of this strong nationalist retaliatory feeling we look for something that expresses at least the hint of a deeper conception, the most that we can find is vv. 12-14, and this more for what they leave unsaid than for what they say.

13. For AV, THE MEASURE OF THY COVETOUSNESS, read, with RSV, THE THREAD OF YOUR LIFE IS CUT.

14. For AV CATERPILLARS read with RSV LOCUSTS.
The combination of a possible appreciation of Babylon in

herself (O YOU WHO DWELL BY MANY WATERS, RICH IN TREASURES) and of God's plans and purpose towards her, open up the prospect of real consideration of the relation between God and Babylon which the author was unable to seize.

THE FALL OF BABYLON
51.41-44, 58

The two things for which Babylon was most famous were her god Bel (see *Bel and the Dragon* in the Apocrypha) and her great wall. Here they are both confounded. Babylon (named in cipher, cf. 25.26 and 51.1), THE PRAISE OF THE WHOLE EARTH, is to become its HORROR; the sea of invaders (cf. 46.7; 47.2; 51.55) will cover it; the land will be uninhabited (cf. 2.6; 50.40); Bel will be compelled to disgorge the nations he has SWALLOWED up, and the great WALL (so admired by Herodotus, I, 178-81) will fall.

58. This reiterates the thought of the destruction of the wall and borrows from Hab. 2.13 to express the thought of the futility of all the slave labour from many nations that had gone into the building of the wall. (For AV, AND THE FOLK IN THE FIRE, AND THEY SHALL BE WEARY, read, with RSV, AND THE NATIONS WEARY THEMSELVES ONLY FOR FIRE.) In point of fact, of course, this was wishful thinking. Though the great wall of Babylon was destroyed, it was not destroyed when the city was captured by Cyrus, but only in the time of Darius (512-514 BC) or Xerxes (485 BC).

At one stage v. 58 was the conclusion of a collection of prophecies ascribed to Jeremiah. See the comment on v. 64.

THE SYMBOLIC CASTING OF
JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY AGAINST
BABYLON INTO THE RIVER
EUPHRATES
51.59-64

As they stand, these verses refer to action taken in relation to the prophecies which have just preceded (50.1-51.58). This is made clear especially by vv. 60, 62. But if Jeremiah prophesied against Babylon in the fourth year of King Zedekiah (593 BC), giving expression to his private conviction that though Babylon was now acting as God's servant (27.6) the time would come when she herself would be subjected as she was subjecting others, because she too was under the control of the living God, then this may well be an authentic historical record, which has been assimilated by later editors to make 50.1-51.58 the content of Jeremiah's prophecy. And so it seems best to take it. If we think that Jeremiah foresaw a long but not interminable exile for his people (25.11; 29.10), if we take seriously his purchase of a field at Anathoth (32.6-15) as significant of his understanding of the future, then it is not unlikely that 25.12, though couched in later terms, may express something of his mind that Babylon was after all human, and under God's control. Jeremiah would not, of course, want such sentiments to be widely publicized. We have seen in 50.1-51.58 how difficult his disciples and admirers found it to enter into his conviction that Babylon was God's instrument to punish Judah for her sin. So he entrusts his prophecy, probably an extremely brief one, to Seraiah, Baruch's brother (see 32.12), when he went as QUARTERMASTER (AV, QUIET PRINCE) with King Zedekiah in the king's fourth year to convince Nebuchadnezzar of his loyalty (after the projected plot to revolt, 27.1-11). The symbolic action of casting the prophecy into the Euphrates is of a piece

with other actions of Jeremiah (see 13.1-11; 19.1-15; 27.2; 28.10, 13).

64. The words in the AV AND THEY SHALL BE WEARY, rightly put in the margin by RSV, are repeated from v. 58. This and the phrase, THUS FAR ARE THE WORDS OF JEREMIAH, show that at one stage v. 58 was the conclusion of a collection of prophecies ascribed to Jeremiah.

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HISTORICAL APPENDIX 52.1-34

FACTUAL INFORMATION CONCERNING THE FALL OF JERUSALEM AND AFTER

This chapter is almost identical with II Kings 24.18-25.30. II Kings 25.22-26, which deal briefly with the story of Gedaliah's governorship of Judah and his assassination, and with the flight to Egypt, more fully reported in 40.7-43.7, are omitted. Verses 28-30, which deal with the numbers of three groups of people deported by Nebuchadrezzar from Judah and Jerusalem, are given here (though not in the LXX) but not in Kings. If this chapter was added before 39.1-2, 4-10 was part of the Book of Jeremiah, then it served a most valuable purpose in relating the life of Jeremiah to the coming of the doom that Jeremiah had so long foreseen. As it is now, it is merely an appendix containing factual information.

THE REIGN OF ZEDEKIAH 52.1-3

This is the generalizing judgment of the historian. We have learnt from the Book of Jeremiah to make a very real distinction between Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. If it was ever true to Jeremiah's understanding of the meaning of the fall of Jerusalem (see 7.15) to say that God CAST THEM OUT FROM HIS PRESENCE, he had gained in the course of his ministry a larger understanding of God and of the people of God (see esp. 29.1-23).

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM
52.4-16

This has already been given in abbreviated form at 39.1-2, 4-10 and comment has been made upon it there.

THE TEMPLE ORNAMENTS TAKEN TO
BABYLON
52.17-23

This is a more expanded description of the temple ornaments than is found in the corresponding verses in II Kings (25.13-17). It is an ironical comment on Jeremiah's controversy with the priests and prophets after the deportation of 597 BC (27.16-32) that the revolt which King Zedekiah was compelled at last to make had precisely the opposite effect that the priests and prophets intended, as Jeremiah had told them. Instead of fanning their indignation against Babylon for the treasures taken away, they would have been better employed in being devoutly thankful that so many were left. Now these too are taken.

THE SUBORDINATE OFFICERS OF THE
JUDEAN REVOLT PUT TO DEATH
52.24-27a

We have already been told (39.6 f.; 52.10 f.) how Nebuchadrezzar dealt with the chief architects of revolt. But those with subordinate responsibility also met a like fate. It is notable that the list includes three orders of priests—the lowest being THE KEEPERS OF THE THRESHOLD. This is right because the priesthood had evidently taken a large share in fomenting the rebellion.

CONCLUSION: THIS IS HOW JUDAH WENT
INTO EXILE
52.27b

The final sentence in v. 27 makes a good finish to the Book of Kings and to this chapter. And no doubt it was so once. But both in the Book of Kings and here there are two postscripts, though where the Book of Kings has the story of Gedaliah, this chapter has the account of the three deportations; both then finish by telling of how more favourable conditions were given to King Jehoiachin.

FIRST POSTSCRIPT: THE NUMBERS OF
THE THREE DEPORTATIONS
52.28-30

From whatever source this comes, the modesty of its numbers is a real guarantee of accuracy as contrasted with the 'ten thousand' of II Kings 24.14. The apparent difference between v. 12, THE NINETEENTH, and v. 29, THE EIGHTEENTH YEAR OF KING NEBUCHADREZZAR is accounted for by the fact that one reckons with an 'accession year' counted separately, and one without. The first deportation refers to 597, the taking into exile of King Jehoiachin (II Kings 24.12-16); the second to 587, the fall of Jerusalem; and the third to 581, in retaliation for the assassination of Gedaliah. If this third date is accurate, and the inference justified, then we have a few years as the time of Gedaliah's governorship rather than the breathless two months which seems to be all that is allowed by 52.12; 39.9 f.; 41.1.

SECOND POSTSCRIPT: AFTER THIRTY-
SEVEN YEARS JEHOIACHIN RECEIVES
FAVOURABLE TREATMENT IN BABYLON
52.31-34

For a king who reigned for only three months, Jehoiachin receives a surprisingly large amount of attention in the Book of Jeremiah (see the comment at 13.18-19 and 22.24-30; 24.1-10; 27.16-22; 28.1-4; 29.1-32). Around him gathered the hopes of the fanatical war-party between 597 and 587, and these Jeremiah was compelled to oppose. We cannot help feeling sorry for Jehoiachin who, as a youth of eighteen, with hardly a chance to show what he was made of as a king, was taken into exile, and only when he was fifty-five, when the long reign of Nebuchadrezzar had at last come to an end, had treatment in exile befitting his rank and importance. The record comes from the time after his death (v. 34) and before the Persian invasion. But let us be under no illusion. The hope that breathes in these verses, apart from a humane concern for Jehoiachin, is a nationalistic hope. J. A. Montgomery calls it concern 'with the theme of the continued dignity of the house of David' ¹ (cf. 33.14-26). But this is not the real upshot of the Book of Jeremiah, nor does the mention of Jehoiachin in the Matthean genealogy (Matt. 1.11 f.) make it so. The picture we should keep in our minds is not Jehoiachin released from prison, however much his personal gifts and graces as well as his lineage rightly won devotion. It is the picture of a very different hope expressed in our last glimpse of Jeremiah in Egypt (see 43.1-3; 44.15-18). He knew that both he and his God had been repudiated once more. In spite of this, he witnessed unweariedly to the fact that the knowledge of God is the supreme privilege of human life, and its absence the supreme deprivation (44.26). Rejected and opposed, he remains secure in God, serene and unafraid.

¹ *The Books of Kings* (International Critical Commentary), 1951, p. 567.

TABLE SHOWING THE ORDER OF
CHAPTERS AND VERSES IN THE
HEBREW AND ENGLISH BIBLE
COMPARED WITH THE LXX

The order of chs. 1 to 24 is the same, though the LXX has some omissions, notably 8.10b-12; 10.6-8, 10; 17.1-5a.

Hebrew and English	LXX	Hebrew and English	LXX
25.1-13a	25.1-13	41	48
25.13b-14	omitted	42	49
25.15-38	32.1-24	43	50
26	33	44	51.1-30
27.1, 21	omitted	45	51.31-35
27.2-20, 22	34.1-18	46.1	25.14
28	35	46.2-28	26.2-28
29	36, omitting vv. 16-20	47	29.1-7
30	37	48.1-44	31
31	38	48.45-47	omitted
32	39	49.1-5	30.1-5
33.1-13	40.1-13	49.6	omitted
33.14-26	omitted	49.7-22	29.8-23
34	41	49.23-27	30.12-16
35	42	49.28-33	30.6-11
36	43	49.34	25.14; 27.1
37	44	50	27
38	45	51	28
39	46, omitting vv. 4-13	52	52, omitting vv. 28-30
40	47		

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